A MIXED METHOD ANALYSIS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT-RUN PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS ON U.S. COLLEGE CAMPUSES

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Student-run public relations firms are part of collegiate public relations pedagogy, and this study used a mixed-method approach to analyze such firms on U.S. campuses. A listing of campuses with student-run firms was created as part of this study. Through an online survey questionnaire, advisers from 55 of the 119 student-run firms provided data about firm characteristics and observations about student learning and career development. Multiple correspondence analyses was used to see if the firms grouped into clusters and somewhat aligned with previous research by Lee Bush in 2009. Firms clustered into four groups, with the fourth group representing a mix of the other three. One additional finding was that firm characteristics are more similar than dissimilar even when comparing firms of varying years in operation. Analysis of variance to compare characteristics between different types of firms revealed that one type of firm tended to employ students at a higher average number of hours per week \((F = 6.61, \eta^2 = 0.16)\) and one was more likely to be accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications \((F = 3.71, \eta^2 = 0.13)\). Advisers reported mostly positive reflections on observed transformations they see in their student workers and the value of the firm experience including how it helps students in post-graduation job attainment. Responses to a graduate questionnaire is included but, because of low response rate \((N = 6)\), provided only cursory information.
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by

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Science fair projects are the best elementary school analogy for what you tackle later in a dissertation. Just like in the fourth grade, teachers, mentors, and parents help you discover something through research and scientific methods. Dr. Kathleen Whitson, committee chair, has been everything you wish for in a mentor: understanding, guiding, thought-provoking and inspirational. Dr. Marc Cutright’s ideas in the proposal phase turned out to be a saving grace in this study and Dr. Daniel Chen skillfully guided me through the maze of statistics and methodology. In fact, this study actually began as a project in Dr. Chen’s research course.

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In journalism education, students have long had the opportunity to hone their newsgathering skills working for the campus newspaper. In more recent years, journalism students interested in public relations began honing their craft at student-run campus public relations firms. While research on public relations pedagogy has received much attention in journals (Aldoory & Wrigley, 2000; Benigni & Cameron, 1999; Benigni, Cheng & Cameron, 2004; Brown & Fall, 2005; DiStaso, Stacks & Botan, 2009; Gower & Reber, 2006; Silverman, 2007; Stacks, Botan & VanSlyke, 1999; Swanson, 2007 Todd, 2009; Witmer, Silverman & Gaschen, 2009), little research has been conducted on the effects of students’ experiences at the student-run public relations firm. A few descriptive studies and one qualitative study have been published to start this research area. In short, the research has yet to reflect on student impact and student learning in the student-run public relations firm. The original concept of this study was organized to capture student data. Due to small returns from graduates, the study was re-focused on the student-firms. An analysis of the student-run firms on U.S. college campuses provides a starting place for future research.

While research about the student-run firms is scant in the literature, the firms have been making news on campuses and in trade publications. In the past year, the University of Texas’ student-run public relations firm announced that it would become its own organization, after being housed within the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) (Colson, 2008). This was done to help differentiate the focuses of the
groups. The student-run firm focuses on hands-on application of public relations and the PRSSA chapter is geared toward networking and skill-building.

Texas Christian University’s student-run firm, RealWorld IMC, made news when it closed its doors (Trainor, 2009). The firm was funded by a three-year university grant of $350,000 and student work generated about $40,000 in revenue annually. According to the news report, the agency director hoped the grant would be renewed and it wasn’t. An effort to raise funds to keep the doors open was unsuccessful (Trainor, 2009).

PR Week covered student-run firms in an article titled “Value of Real World Lessons” (Lewis, 2008). The article provided an overview of student-run firms by highlighting firms and their activities. It showcased firms from Boston University, Valparaiso University, University of Georgia, and University of Southern California. Faculty advisers commented on how firms connect students with clients and practical, hands-on approaches to public relations.

Problem Statement

Student-run firms may have received some media attention, but little analysis has been conducted. The problem is that student-run firms are part of public relations education, but not much is known about their impact on students and student learning. Examining the firms and their effects on students provides a basis for agency improvement with student success and learning at the forefront. The purpose of this study is to look at the undergraduate student-run public relations firms in American higher education. The study also offers a framework for looking at other campus media
laboratory set-ups like the convergence center, campus newspaper, radio station, TV station or magazine.

Research on journalism education, public relations education, experiential learning, service learning, internships and student work were consulted in the formation of this study. The theoretical framework is a fusion of literature from communication and higher education. One study in particular is used to form a couple of the research questions. Bush (2009) used interviews with advisers of student-run public relations firms (N=10) to create a typology for firms.

Research Questions

The research questions posed in this study are designed to look at student-run public relations firms. A mixed-method research design was used to approach the following research questions:

1: What are the common characteristics of student-run firms at institutions of higher education in the U.S.?

2: What benefits of agency work experience for the undergraduate students do the advisers of student-run public relations agencies report?

3: What observations do the advisers of student-run public relations agencies report on student learning?

4: What observations do the advisers of student-run public relations agencies report on career development?

5: Do student-run firms group into three types as proposed by Bush (2009)?
6: Is there a significant difference between types (Bush, 2009) and

- firms’ years in operation?
- student involvement?
- average number of hours students work at firm per week
- firms within Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) accredited programs?

Hypotheses for the research questions are that firms will have distinct characteristics, especially between the types suggested by Bush (2009). The firms typically market themselves as one-of-a-kind or the only firm of its type in the state. It is hard to anticipate what characteristic will be present because little research has been conducted in this area. It is hypothesized that adviser comments will largely tout the merits of firm experience by highlighting the real-world and hands-on applications provided. Advisers will likely say the firm students can see public relations in action and will have more portfolio pieces to showcase in the job search. For the fourth research question, firms will categorize into three types.

Originally research questions focused on undergraduate students and comparing the students working for the student-run public relations firm with the non-working students on factors of GPA and employment within the field. The original questions, which were not viable due to a lack of graduate responses, are included here for reference:
1: Is there a significant difference in GPA between undergraduate public relations majors who work for the campus student-run public relations agency and those public relations majors who do not?

2: Is there a significant difference in employment within the field between undergraduate public relations majors who work for the campus student-run public relations agency and those public relations majors who do not?

3: Is there a significant difference between public relations undergraduates working at Type 1, Type 2 and Type 3 (as defined by Bush, 2009) student-run public relations agencies on the factors of GPA and employment?

4: How do public relations majors describe their para-professional experiences working for the student-run public relations agencies?

5: What learning outcomes do undergraduate public relations majors report about their experiences working at the student-run public relations agency?

6: What career insights do undergraduate public relations majors report about their experiences working at the student-run public relations agency?

Research questions were formed from the literature. Question No. 1 was based on research (English and Koeppen, 1993; Hauck, Allen & Rondinelli, 2000; Knouse, Tanner & Harris, 1999) showing GPA differences between students in industry-related internships and those without internships. The second question is based on research showing interns securing employment at rates different from graduates without internships (Brooks, Cornelius, Greenfield & Joseph, 1995; Callanan & Benzing, 2004;
Fang & Lee, 2005; Gault, Redington & Schlager, 2000; Schuurman, Pangborn & McClintic, 2005). Bush’s 2009 study and Schuurman, Pangborn & McClintic’s 2005 study were used to guide the third question. The hypotheses for the original three research questions were that there would be a difference between those undergraduate public relation majors working for the campus agency and those who did not.

Revisions to the study moved the focus onto the firms and their characteristics, as reported by advisers. Also, the study captured observations from advisers about student experiences. The value of studying the student-run firms remains.

Definitions

The definitions for constructs in this study are listed below and are described more fully in the next paragraph.

Student-run public relations firm – an agency or firm providing undergraduate students the opportunity to work as if they were employed at a professional public relations agency; firms with public relations components were included. If a firm had both advertising and public relations functions, it was included. Methodology for inclusion of firms in the study is explained in Chapter 3.

Adviser – the primary staff or faculty member responsible for the student-run public relations firm; adviser is the preferred spelling in communication fields

Public relations majors – undergraduates who graduated with a public relations major from a journalism department or school; for the adviser survey, all students working for the student-run firm were included. Some firms had open access policies, so students could have represented other majors.
Work at the student-run firm – for the adviser survey, work was simply time spent on agency activities, paid or unpaid

Payment/compensation – students could be compensated for their work at the student-run firm in credit hours, stipend or hourly wage

Employment in major field – full-time public relations position

Student involvement – the construct was created from adviser comments on five question about how often students were involved in decision making; a complete description of the construct is outlined in the methodology chapter

For this study, public relations majors were those undergraduates who graduated with a public relations major in a journalism department or school. Universities have different names for this major. Some call it strategic communication, advertising/public relations or integrated marketing communication (IMC). The case was similar with course titles in the field’s earlier days including terms like publicity, public opinion and propaganda (Lee, 1947). While similar, there may be subtle differences in the curriculum required of students in these programs. This was handled on a school-to-school basis and noted for those willing to have their graduates participate. For schools without a designated public relations major, an emphasis in a public relations sequence was considered. Students with double or triple majors were considered as long as one of the majors was public relations. Reports from the adviser survey were used to better define working for the student-run public relations agency. Originally this was going to be defined as at least two paid semesters. From the adviser survey, this definition would have excluded six firms where advisers reported students only spending an average of
one semester at the firm. The average number of semesters reported by the advisers was between two and three semesters.

Payment was considered in the form of credit hours, stipend or an hourly wage. It was anticipated that student work would exceed 10 hours each week. From the adviser results, more students worked 0-6 hours than 7-14 hours per week. Employment in the major field was students securing a permanent full-time job within their intended field (public relations) within six months of graduation. In lieu of creating a schema for what constitutes a public relations position, respondents were asked if they secured a public relations position. For public relations graduates, positions as assistant account representatives or account representatives at public relations firms or corporate communications departments would be examples of work within their intended major.

Significance

There’s a commonplace belief that working for the campus media outlet is a good learning experience for communication students. Much of this belief is perpetuated by anecdotal stories. Research that looks into effects of the experiential learning through student-run public relations firms on students could bolster programs and help sustain funding. Empirical data needs to be collected to accompany those anecdotal stories. Structures that permit learning or positive qualities could be mimicked in courses to improve learning for a larger number of students. Additional positions on the public relations agency staffs could expand the training to more students. Other disciplines could look for similar on-campus experiential learning opportunities for their students.
Limitations

Efforts have been made to mitigate for limitations in this study. Limitations in the methodology begin with the list of universities with student-run public relations firms. A list was obtained from the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA). This list is based on universities with PRSSA firms self-reporting that they have a student-run public relations firm. To bolster the strength of the list, the PRSSA list was compared with an independent search conducted prior to receiving the list. Details are outlined in the methods section. The list used in the study is believed to be comprehensive at the time of the study. But, universities that do not participate in PRSSA or document their student-run firm on the university’s Web site or student newspaper could have been overlooked.

The researcher also relied on the PRSSA Web site to obtain contact information for the advisers of the student-run firms for the administration of a questionnaire sent to the firms’ advisers. For universities that were found in the independent search, the adviser name posted on the PRSSA Web site was cross-checked.

Limitations in collecting data from graduates from U.S. colleges and universities with student-run public relations firms were universities’ policies and advisers’ willingness to participate in this study. In the adviser questionnaire, advisers were asked if they were willing to help the researcher connect with public relations graduates. This depended not only on the adviser’s willingness but also his or her time to help. How and where the public relations program keeps records about graduates was an issue. The quality of the list depended on the university. Prior to administering the adviser questionnaire, the researcher did not know how many universities would be supportive
of the research or have the available resources. A severe limitation was the ability to connect directly with graduates. As previously mentioned, an entire phase of this study, the graduate survey, did not produce enough responses for analysis.

Self-report was the method of data collection from both the advisers and public relations graduates. Questions possibly inflated by graduates might include those on GPA, or how many internships they had.

The use of grade point average (GPA) as an indicator of success and a measure of learning is a limitation. It reflects a limited interpretation. For the purpose of this study, GPA, along with securing employment within their major field, was used to assess student success. There is also a possible element of self-select. Would certain students be more likely to pursue a position at a student-run public relations firm than others? Are these students high achievers, more assertive, opportunity seeking or joiners? Lastly, students do not benefit equally from experiences (Kuh, 1995). Institutional and student characteristics are at play.

**Delimitations**

Institutional characteristics reported were limited to if the program has a student-run public relations firm, accreditation status and public versus private. The study included only U.S. institutions. Another delimitation was that it did not look at journalism students who work for campus newspaper, TV, radio stations or advertising campaign teams. The study only looked at public relations students, in order to compare those who worked at their public relations firms and those who did not. The numbers of students pursuing TV and radio are lower than those in public relations or news-editorial
There is some research to support similarities (Sallot, Steinfatt and Salwen, 1998) and differences (Culbertson, 1986) between journalists and public relations students and practitioners, so some parallels might exist, but were not covered in this study. Peer group and socialization factors were not investigated in the scope of this study.

Another delimitation is that the timing of students’ experience at the student-run public relations firm was not collected. When a student worked at the firm during his or her collegiate career might have varying effects on learning. Does the experience have more impact at the beginning of coursework, concurrent with courses in public relations or just prior to graduation? The scope of this study focused on working versus not working and the number of hours and semester worked. It did not attempt to place the experience into students’ continuum of learning while in college.

Conclusion

This study aims to provide a description of student-run public relations firms. The firm is an experiential tool in the public relation’s educational arsenal and more should be known. The defunct graduate part of the study aimed to illustrate the implications of students’ campus public relations work experience on the factors of GPA and securing employment within their intended field. While this would have shown student impact, data about the firms and comments from the firm advisers shed light on these learning labs. In a broader sense, the study provided more research and could lead to future studies that test the belief that the public relations agencies impact students in a positive manner. The results could lead to changes in perceptions about student work experiences created to help students. It could lead to further research to isolate learning
mechanisms that could be modeled in classroom environments in journalism and other fields.

The remainder of the study will be organized as follows. Chapter 2 includes a review of literature in journalism education, public relations pedagogy, experiential learning concepts, and other fields with internship programs. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 will chronicle the results and Chapter 5 will include a discussion of the findings and conclusion.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The bulk of research on journalism students pertains to censorship, writing, and First Amendment issues. Lee Becker and colleagues’ Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates provides national data about enrollment trends and provides a picture of the students once they graduate (Becker, Vlad & McLean, 2007). This data about the new journalists launching into the labor market is valuable and gives a trend analysis of students entering the field. However, there is a gap in research looking at characteristics of journalism students and the implications of their experiences working at the student-run media outlets. More specifically speaking, there is very little research dedicated to student-run public relations agencies and their students. A substantial body of research has analyzed public relations pedagogy, even looking at specific courses in most curriculums. There is room and reason to study the student-run public relations firms and their effects on students.

This review of literature will include research and perspectives on journalism and public relations education to date, demographic data about journalism and public relations students, experiential learning, problem-based learning, working students, internships, and profiles on student-run public relations firms. Literature specifically addressing the student-run firms is scant. This dissertation will use research from the above areas to build a theoretical framework.

In this review “journalism students” will be used to characterize the students pursuing degrees in journalism and mass communication. The term “mass
"communication" is a more inclusive term, but will be omitted for the sake of brevity. Where necessary, students’ specific concentrations of study (news-editorial, public relations, radio-TV-film) will be used.

As recently as fall 2006, more than 209,000 students were enrolled in journalism programs in the United States (Becker, 2007). In 2005-2006, journalism programs granted more than 53,000 degrees (Becker, 2007). Most students in a journalism program will take similar introductory courses and will begin to specialize in their later years as undergraduates. Trends in journalism education are showing how generalization and convergence may trump the former specializations. In 1988, 85.2% of American journalism students were enrolled in the tradition sequences (advertising, journalism, public relations and telecommunications). In 2006, the number dropped to 65.3% (Becker, 2007). Becker also noted growth in enrollments in the more general “communications studies.” The trend may be moving toward a truly converged curriculum, but more than half of students were still enrolled in traditional sequences just a few years ago. Converged media labs connect student journalists from print, TV, radio, Web and new media persuasions. While also communicators, the public relations student and practitioner are still on the outside; they are working to present a certain message using mass media.

Journalism Education History

Public relations education is typically part of a university’s journalism department or school. It was essentially a sub-discipline of journalism (Grunig, 1989). An abbreviated history of journalism education is provided to give a backdrop for the beginnings of public relations education. In America’s early days, journalists were taught
through apprenticeship (Weaver & Gray, 1980). Journalism education in higher education started as an extension of the English department (Dickson, 2000, English, 1988, Fröhlich & Holtz-Bacha, 2003,) or philosophy department (Fröhlich & Holtz-Bacha, 2003). In 1857, the board of directors for Farmers’ High School (now Pennsylvania State) recommended that journalism education become an “integral” part of the institution’s curriculum (O’Dell, 1935). It wasn’t until a few years later that courses were offered.

In some schools, journalism education was actually educating students to be printers (Weaver & Gray, 1980, Fröhlich & Holtz-Bacha, 2003, Sutton, 1945 as cited in Sutton, 2002). Washington and Lee University, called Washington College at the time, offered printing training after the Civil War (Fröhlich & Holtz-Bacha, 2003). O’Dell called this 1869 course in journalism “meager” (1935). Schools like Kansas State College, University of Missouri and University of Pennsylvania also taught printing courses in the late 1800s (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986). Denver University began journalism courses in 1882 and the University of Kansas followed in 1894 (O’Dell, 1935).

The first chair of journalism was appointed in 1869 at Washington University, but was abandoned “several years later” (Journalism Education, 1927). O’Dell asserts that the first journalism course at Kansas State College was in 1873 (Dickson, 2000). He also points to the first journalism curriculum starting at a journalism school for women in Detroit in 1886 (Dickson, 2000). Dickson points to Hints to Hire Editors as the first journalism textbook. Writing courses were offered at Cornell University in 1888-1889 (Sutton, 2002).
Seeds were planted in the late 1890s, but journalism schools weren’t realized until after the turn of the century. Joseph Pulitzer pledged $2 million in 1890 to start a journalism school at Columbia University, and the school opened in 1912 (English, 1988). The University of Missouri’s school beat Columbia by four years to become the first journalism school in the world (English, 1988). This is more than 200 years after the first American newspaper is published; *Publick Occurrences, Both Forreign and Domestick* in 1690 lasted one issue (Sloan, 1993).

Between 1873 and 1903, 13 institutions of higher education offered journalism courses (O’Dell, 1935). One school of journalism and three journalism departments were reported in 1910. There were four journalism schools in 1920. The number jumps to 28 in 1920, and 54-55 in 1927 (Journalism Education, 1927). In 1926, 884 students in the U.S. graduated with journalism degrees; a year later this number was 931 (Journalism Education, 1927). By this time there were 10,000 college graduates practicing journalism in the United States (Journalism Education, 1927). Since the beginning of journalism studies, an experiential learning component was available. The Journalism Bulletin included an article that listed 18 ideas for making the fit more fit in journalism and No. 9 was to include realistic practice work in the curriculum (Hyde, 1927).

The campus newspaper has been a part of journalism curriculum since the early days. When the University of Missouri established the first school of journalism in the world, in 1908, the *University Missourian*, a student-run campus daily newspaper, emerged concurrently (English, 1988). The newspaper was to give students a laboratory for actual work. When area publishers reacted to having a competitor for
advertising dollars, the dean of the University of Missouri journalism school presented the argument that a school of journalism was like other schools (law, medicine, agriculture) because the training needs to happen through practice within the professional school (English, 1988). The school should, the dean said, use the university to equip men and women for journalism careers; publish a newspaper giving students a practical way to learn; have a self-supporting newspaper as the laboratory; and work with those in industry (English, 1988).

In other schools, the campus newspaper preceded the creation of a journalism department or school. At Texas Christian University, the *Skiff* began publishing in 1902. An entrepreneur football player started it to fund his education. A journalism department followed in 1927 and the *Skiff* became a laboratory publication (Horst, 2004).

Connections between higher education and public relations began much earlier. Wilcox, Ault & Agee (1986) note that Kings College, now Columbia University, issued its first press release in 1758. It was about commencement. A more substantial public relations movement happened about 150 years later. Cutlip, Center & Bloom (2000) report that Yale created a public relations office in 1899. Charles Eliot at Harvard retained the services of the first public relations firm the next year. The University of Pennsylvania and University of Wisconsin set up in-house public relations offices in 1904.

Public relations courses came along in the 1920s, even though the foundations for publicity and message management started much earlier. The term "public relations" was first used in 1897 in railroad literature and the first public relations firm, Publicity
Bureau, was established in 1900 (Cutlip, Center & Bloom, 2000). A university publicity director taught a publicity course at the University of Illinois in 1920 (Dickson, 2000). In 1922, Indiana University offered a publicity course (Cutlip, Center & Bloom, 2000). Edward Bernays taught the first course called “public relations” in 1923 at New York University (Hutchinson, 2003, Grunig 1989).

By 1935, there were 400 schools of journalism (Schramm, 1997, p. 108). In the next 20 years, a variety of universities began offering courses in public relations. Twenty-one colleges and universities offered public relations courses by 1945 (Grunig, 1989). A study in 1947 identified 30 institutions with public relations courses and the majority of them were housed within the journalism school or department (Lee, 1947).

A shift in the professionalism of public relations education occurred when Scott Cutlip entered the scene in 1947. He has been labeled the father of public relations education (D.K. Wright, 1991). Public relations education moved from a vocational, technical administration of skills to a more of a profession. In a tribute, Wright phrased Cutlip’s impact like this: “You nurtured us (public relations education), cleaned us up, and made us presentable” (p. 335).

In 1957, a Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) survey showed 92 schools offering public relations courses and 14 with a public relations major (Cutlip, Center & Bloom, 2000). Fourteen schools offered bachelor’s degrees in public relations by 1964. Twenty-nine had majors and 280 offered courses. These graduates were headed into a job market where the 1960 Census reflected about 35,000 people working in public relations (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 1986).
The majority of public relations courses and programs found their homes within the journalism department. A 1970 PRSA study showed 66.3 percent of the 142 programs that responded were housed within the journalism or communications part of higher education (Dickson 2000). About 303 institutions had public relations courses at this time (Cutlip, Center & Bloom, 2000).

In the 1980s, PRSA’s Commission on Public Relations Education estimated there were 10,000 students taking public relation courses (Cutlip, Center & Bloom, 2000). By this time, it was estimated that 100,000 people worked in public relations (Wilcox, Ault & Agee, 1986).

Blanchard and Christ’s New Professionalism of 1993 called for curricular reform that would create an integrated or holistic approach to media education. One element was an experiential learning component where students would participate in on-campus apprenticeships (Dickson, 2000). The authors mention the student newspaper, radio and television stations. The on-campus student-run public relations firms would also be examples. Familiarity and understanding would be the focus of the experiential learning, instead of simply learning the technical aspects of the technology of the day.

Accreditation Information

Journalism education in the American higher education system is accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC). This is mentioned here because 19 media industry groups and six education groups compose this entity (Fröhlich & Holtz-Bacha, 2003). In 2003, Hutchinson wrote that 15 U.S. university programs in public relations were accredited by
the Accrediting Council of AEJMC and 10 were certified by PRSA. Some public relations departments are housed within journalism departments, which may have AEJMC accreditation.

Research has looked at differences between accredited and non-accredited programs. Benigni, Cheng and Cameron (2004) found that accredited programs were more likely to offer public relations campaigns courses and the average class enrollments of such classes were similar between accredited and non-accredited programs. Prerequisites and client types were not so different either. Similar research was found among media writing programs (Masse & Popovich, 2007). Analysis of survey results from instructors teaching introductory media writing courses (N=376) showed that only small pedagogical differences exist between the accredited and non-accredited programs when looking at the particular course. This is mentioned because the current study will collect data from both accredited and non-accredited programs. The Public Relations Society of America offers a certification review process for undergraduate public relations programs. Firms from certified programs will be noted in the data file.

Public Relations Pedagogy

Researchers have devoted time to aspects of public relations pedagogy. They have looked at multiple angles, the larger picture and down to the individual course (Aldoory & Wrigley, 2000; Benigni & Cameron, 1999; Swanson, 2007). Practitioners and educators have been asked repeatedly about public relations pedagogy (Aldoory & Wrigley, 2000; Basow & Byrne, 1993; Benigni & Cameron, 1999; Brown & Fall, 2005; Neff, Walker, Smith & Creedon, 1999). A 2006 study by Gower and Reber analyzed
student perceptions of public relations pedagogy. They wanted to discover if students thought they were adequately prepared for public relations practice. From an online survey of 209 juniors and seniors at nine U.S. universities, findings suggested that students felt more prepared in understandings and leadership than tactical skills. Students rated the following as the items for which they felt the weakest feelings of preparation: revenue and expense profiles, new technologies, financial and budgeting skills. Gower and Reber suggest that business skills and managerial skills could be more prevalent in the curriculum. A weakness is that we do not know the amount of outside experiences these students had at the time of the survey administration. It is not known if they had already participated in a campaigns course, internships or the student-run agency.

Results from the 1985 Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education showed that public relations practitioners and educators surveyed rated internships/practicums as the No. 1 course for public relations; English was the highest rated “general education course” to be included in the public relations curriculum (Dickson, 2000).

The Port of Entry study, an investigation of public relations in higher education, was produced by the Public Relations Society of America in 1999. One of the guiding assumptions of the commission’s report was:

“Effective preparation of public relations practitioners will not be accomplished by curriculum content alone, but only when content is provided by competent
instructors, when it is supplemented by hands-on experience and when it is subject to evaluation.”

The writers recommended the ideal public relations major and public relations focus/sequence would include “supervised work in public relations (internship)” (Commission, 1999). One way to help students gain hands-on experience is accomplished through a capstone course where students develop a public relations campaign for a client, real or hypothetical.

Campaigns Courses

In public relations curriculum, most programs include a campaigns course or senior capstone course where students create a public relations campaign. Eighty-eight percent of programs responding to Benigni and Cameron’s 1999 study required public relations majors to take a campaigns course. The response rate was 35 percent.

Aldoory and Wrigley (2000) conducted an exploratory study (N=30) asking students what they learned from using actual clients in a campaigns course. Students agreed strongly that having an actual client for campaign work offered context and meaning to the classroom. Students also responded strongly that using actual clients is a better way to teach public relations. Aldoory and Wrigley caution against generalizing this data but said it provided a beginning for studying experiential learning in public relations.

Using actual clients versus a theoretical client was the focus of Parsons and Lepkowska-White’s 2009 study. Marketing students approached projects in two ways for the study. One group consulted with actual clients to solve real client problems. The
other group selected a company and identified a hypothetical problem for the company. More than 290 students, from a total of two colleges, participated. Researchers found that the undergraduate students found the theoretical projects just as effective, sometimes more effective, than the projects involving real clients. They said both styles helped them learn more about the subject area and gain additional skills. The theoretical projects gave students more security and were not as overwhelming as the real-client projects.

A difference between student work for the agency and work completed in a campaigns course is that the course typically ends with a presentation. Implementation of the plan is in large part left up to the client. In one study, about 70 percent of clients used the student plans for campaigns “significantly” (Benigni, Cheng & Cameron, 2004).

In the agency setting, students are creating, presenting and then implementing the campaign. In 1999, a study found that 92 percent of campaigns students in the sample used had actual clients (Benigni & Cameron, p. 55), but only half of the campaigns courses use an agency-type backdrop for the class environment (p. 58). They suggest that an agency structure should be more widely adopted. In a larger 2004 study, 96 percent of the campaign teachers invited actual clients to participate in the campaigns class and 90 percent used an agency structure (Benigni, Cheng & Cameron, p. 265).

Another difference between the student-run agency and the campaigns course is the concept of client retention (Benigni, Cheng & Cameron, 2004). There is a terminal nature to the course, but not necessarily so for the agency. The agency will want and
need to retain clients for more than a semester in order to succeed. Some research points to a limited amount of retention for the campaigns course. Twenty-nine percent of professors use the same real client more than one semester of a campaigns course (Benigni, Cheng & Cameron, 2004). The authors cited the difficulty in finding clients and the amount of time a professor must spend connecting with the client as possible reasons for this phenomenon. So, direct retention efforts may be more of a product of the professor-client relationship than the student-client relationship.

Direct client interaction is another area of possible difference. In a campaigns course, the client may visit the class in an initial client-meeting set-up or for a final presentation of a campaign (Aldoory & Wrigley, 2000). The campaigns course may not meet as frequently as the agency students would. Benigni, Cheng and Cameron (2004) found that 49 percent of the campaigns class professors reported having weekly meetings and 26 percent said they met less frequently.

A comparison between a campaigns class and a student-run public relations firm is mentioned because one could be viewed as a preliminary snapshot of the other. The campaigns course is a class and managed by an instructor who provides a grade. The agency is a workplace. Benigni and Cameron (1999) assert that a campaigns course “can never be sufficient to fully prepare students for real-world experiences” (p. 50).

Service Learning

Some public relations campaigns courses have used a service-learning focus, selecting clients with a public service type message. Silverman (2007) documented a case where students in her campaigns course created a public relations campaign to
increase organ donation awareness. Class members selected a tactical team and class meetings during the first half of the semester were devoted to lecture, guest lectures about organ donation, and team meetings. An interesting component about this class is that the campaign was implemented and evaluated during the second half of the 15-week semester. Students’ knowledge about organ donation increased significantly from pre-test to post-test. Student reflection papers at the end of the semester provided some insight into student perceptions of their learning. One student reported, “…this class was an introduction to the real world, half of it still rooted in the college environment of learning, but the other half involved in actually helping real people and creating awareness about a very important cause” (Silverman, 2007, p. 418). The author suggests that her students found the execution, not just the conceptual planning, of the campaign to be a valuable experience. She even said the experience could be added to students’ resumes and provides a discussion item in future employment interviews.

A 2009 study looking at service learning in public relations courses showed that most public relations faculty members defined service learning as a form of experiential learning (Witmer, Silverman & Gaschen). The mixed method study included a survey (N=127) and interviews with 34 public relations educators. Those interviewed said the students’ growth as practitioners was the most rewarding part of using a service-learning component. The professors interviewed said one goal of using service learning was to give students an application to real-world settings. The researchers found that professors encouraged reflection on public relations practices, but not as many reported student reflection on community involvement and the service aspects.
Jacoby (1999) defines service learning as a form of experiential learning where students learn and develop from designed activities that address human or community needs. She said the learning is both curricular and co-curricular, inside the classroom and out. Some of the student-run public relations agencies solicit nonprofit clients for pro-bono work where the student account executives can practice their skills and provide a service to their community partners. Jacoby said service learning in a course can offer more accountability for students, but co-curricular experiences “can yield rich learning and developmental outcomes as well” (Jacoby, 1999, p. 20).

Vocational vs. Liberal Arts

The balance between industry and academia is one that continues today. Is journalism education technical training or a liberal arts education? Should it be taught through on-the-job experience or in the academy with a base in liberal arts. At its beginnings, journalism education in the academy faced this same question.

Two universities are good historical models for the dichotomy. Willard Bleyer’s journalism program at the University of Wisconsin was entrenched in liberal arts and Walter William’s University of Missouri program was a professional school touting hands-on training (Reese, 1999).

Schramm (1997) asserts that most journalism in higher education was of a vocational nature even into the 1940s. The industry wanted journalists who could write and spell. The ones doing the hiring wanted journalists who knew the practical basics of the job. Professors in journalism schools were seasoned newspaper journalists. Most did not have research backgrounds or PhDs.
Newsroom environment and interactions with editors were paramount to journalists in the 1990s as factors shaping professional values (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996, p. 171). In more recent commissions and reports, a balance is urged between the “philosophical and operational” (Dickson, 2000, p. 229, citing the Mullins Report). Reese (1999) said the theory versus practice dichotomy is “misframed” in journalism education. He was specifically talking about the Freedom Forum’s research report about journalism education called Winds of Change: Challenges Confronting Journalism Education. He criticizes the report’s findings and calls for a more integrated view for journalism education, similar to how Ernest Boyer expanded the definition of scholarship (p. 84).

In a Delphi study, journalism educators, media practitioners and students reiterated perceptions that students in journalism programs should have practical and hands-on experience (Smith, 1997). The three groups mentioned hands on learning as “highly desirable” and 95.7 percent of respondents said this experience should be a part of the curriculum. The reason for this type of preparation was to help the students enter the field. Respondents also pointed to the importance of students gaining experience through internships (89.1 percent) and campus media (76.1 percent).

Campus Media Outlets

As mentioned in the historical portion of this chapter, campus media outlets have been a way for students to gain hands-on experience. A listing from the Public Relations Student Society of America shows 124 of its members self-reporting a student-run public relations firm. To provide a comparison, a reference to campus newspapers is included. In Becker’s 1991 results of the annual survey, he reported that working for a campus newspaper was still an important part of most journalism programs. Fifty-seven
percent of respondents to the principal questionnaire \((N=304)\) said working for the campus newspaper is part of the curriculum. When adjusted for those only submitting a shorter-version of the survey, the percentage increases to 59.7. The number of campuses having a public relations firm as part of its curriculum was not reported.

Campus public relations firms mimic real-world agencies just as the student newspaper mimics real-world newspapers. In the public relations firm, students would work to create public relations campaigns for clients. This might include research like surveys and focus groups, event planning, media relations, graphic design and campaign evaluation.

A few student-run public relations firms have received recognition in academic journals. A brief synopsis about these agencies gives the reader a glimpse into the settings. Imagewest, a student-run agency, was established in 2004 at Western Kentucky University (Imagewest, 2005). Students working for the firm receive course credit and a stipend during what they call an internship. Students apply and interview for positions at the firm. Their clients are both on-and-off campus and are diverse. Their list includes a hospital, attorney, church, nonprofits, credit union, and many campus departments and organizations. Services seem full-service ranging from logo creation and other graphic design to research to event planning to news release writing to printing.

Much earlier than Imagewest, Del-Com was awarded a contract to help its university promote summer programs. In 1980, the student-run agency at the University of Delaware even beat out professional agencies for a campaign (Mogavero, 1982).
Del-com was designed to provide agency functions for the State of Delaware, corporate Wilmington and the University of Delaware. Students working for the firm had finished their core coursework and most already had one internship experience. About 15 students worked for the agency. The agency was run out of a course and covered two semesters. The students’ campaign to promote university enrollment was deemed a success; a five-year decline in enrollment halted.

Central Coast PRspectives (CCPR) is the student-run public relations firm at California Polytechnic State University (Swanson, 2007). It began in 2002 and its client base is community nonprofits. Students working for the firm are enrolled in a capstone course called advanced public relations practice. The firm has an open-door policy where any student may volunteer for the firm. The student leader for the firm earns academic credit for his or her role. Students were required to attend a one-hour planning meeting and then work four hours during the week on a campaign. CCPR receives $2,500 from the university per year and has its own office.

One recent study actually looks at student public relations agencies and pedagogy. In Bush’s (2009) qualitative study, she used a snowball sample to learn more about the pedagogical benefits and risks of the firms. Bush conducted in-depth interviews with advisers from 10 student-run firms. Findings show three pedagogical benefits: experiential learning/process learning, professional identity development and career choices/opportunities (p. 31). A better picture of the structure of firms came out of her research. Firms typically had a student leader and other students serving as account executives. Some students had titles that were task-oriented like creative director or vice president of media relations. A team approach was taken toward client
accounts. Bush (2009) created a schema for the “types” of agencies. She classified them as Type 1, Type 2, and Type 3. Type 1 most resembled a real-world firm and had a low risk of dissolving. Type 1 firms were team based, had concrete business protocols, a competitive application process, some paid student staff, dedicated office space and for-profit and nonprofit clients (p. 34). Firms exist on a continuum of participation and professionalism. The Type 3 firms had a high risk of dissolving and there are no required meetings. A Type 3 agency would have an open admission policy and students would essentially be volunteers. Prior to reading the Bush study, a benchmarking study was conducted to find the student-run firms in United States universities. The benchmarking project also showed a varying degree of intensity of firms. Some resembled a club-like personality while others were professionally run with store fronts and longevity. Bush’s study is important to this research because her schema will be used to divide the surveyed firms into types.

Bush (2009) cited the Type 1 agencies as the model that can fill voids in coursework. She asserts that agency work fills in where campaigns courses or service learning cannot. The agency work also focuses on process-oriented work, as opposed to the sometimes task-oriented work from an internship (p. 35). Process-oriented experiential learning and professional skills were the two primary benefits that Bush cites.

Internships

The campus newspaper and public relations firm are essentially in-house internship programs and the next section will investigate research on internships and their effects on measures like GPA and career attainment. Research from public
relations and journalism will be supplemented with data from other academic fields. An article from geology answers the question about why a program might feel strongly about internships: “Internships offer students a chance to apply what they have learned in the classroom; to test skills, facts and theories; to evaluate existing professional competences; and to make plans to fill gaps in preparation that reveal themselves during the experience” (Sublett & Mattingly, 2005).

The on-campus media outlet or public relations agency are not the only experiential opportunities that journalism programs promote for students. Becker (1991) reports that 94 percent of journalism programs give credit hours for field experience in mass communication. Also, 95 percent of programs have internships as part of the curriculum. The effects of other internships will be controlled for in this study in an attempt to isolate the effects of the public relations firms. The other internships would share some of the same characteristics of the public relations firm experiences. Similarities would include tasks the students might complete, hours worked, and socialization in industry ways. One area that might differ would be the supervision a student would receive. The student-run media outlets are typically advised by a full-time university employee. A student’s mentor or contact at an off-campus internship would be employed by the sponsoring company. Quality control of the adviser would be more easily monitored at the university and Beard and Morton (1999) found that quality of supervision was the characteristic most highly predictive of successful internship outcomes. They looked at survey results from 193 public relations and advertising students.
Public relations programs affiliated with PRSSA chapters are required to offer supervised internship experiences (PRSSA, n.d.). This is worth mentioning because the list of advisers asked to participate in this study started from a list of PRSSA chapters.

Brown and Fall (2005) analyzed internship programs for public relations students from the perspective of the site managers, the public relations professionals hosting the interns. The site managers surveyed \((N=109)\) said the skills most necessary to perform internship duties were writing, oral and organizational skills. Respondents were asked to respond about interns in general, and the author suggests this makes the study generalizable; a limitation to this study is that a large portion (65 percent) of the site managers was from the nonprofit sector. Site managers wanted to see a higher degree of professionalism from the interns and thought this deserved more attention in the public relations curriculum. The authors suggest faculty members encourage students to pursue on-the-job training and that internships could provide that desired experiential learning.

Todd’s 2009 study \((N=118)\) showed that PRSSA professional advisers, practitioners who are members of the PRSSA listserv, valued required internships more than faculty respondents. These findings disagree with research published in the 2006 Commission on Public Relations Education. The Commission’s report showed the two parties valued the internship equally. The Commission’s 2006 report showed that most public relations majors completed one internship, according to PRSSA faculty advisers surveyed. Practical experience was one of the top reasons for hiring entry-level practitioners, according the Commission report.
In a three-year study, Fall (2006) hypothesized that the more public relations majors enrolled in a required one-hour credit internship course are able to use what they’ve learned in coursework the more it influences their career choices. Students, predominantly seniors, responded to a survey \((N=203)\) after completing the course. Fall’s hypothesis was supported in the regression analysis with “opportunity to use what they learned in class” as the predictor variable.

Journalism students view internships as highly valuable, according to a phenomenological study by Getz in 2002. He looked at five year’s worth of narratives written by journalism undergraduates at a single institution after an internship experience. Getz did not explore GPA or career attainment, but did draw a conclusion that the interns returned to college with “new perspectives from which to approach their final semesters in college.” The value and perspectives could have an impact on subsequent GPA or motivation to obtain a career in the field. Astin (1993) showed that participating in an internship program, among a sample of undergraduate students of varying majors and institutions, correlated positively with student GPA.

Basow and Byrne’s (1993) research was geared toward helping internship coordinators. An analysis of pre-internship and post-internship questionnaires revealed that students completing longer internships agreed more with statements about career insights than the students completing shorter stints. A position at the student-run public relations firm would likely last longer than a two-week internship blitz, and therefore falls into Basow and Byrne’s category of the longer internship. They also found that receiving payment for internship experiences increased student perceptions of educational preparedness and career insights. Another observation was that “perhaps the most
valuable experience students gain is in the learning to adjust to the climate and
structure of the workplace” (Basow & Byrne, 1993, p. 52). It’s this kind of statement that
cries out for better understanding of the effects of student work and internship
experiences on student factors.

Securing that first job after undergraduate journalism study is affected by
internships, according to a 2008 study. Neidorf interviewed journalism students at three
universities interested in pursuing print careers at newspapers or magazines. The small
sample (N=16) prevents generalization, but the author found that students with
internships under their belt “fared better in the job market” (Neidorf, 2008, p. 59). The
students with two or more internships were more successful in securing a first job in the
field than those in the study with one or no internship experience. This raises a question
of an invisible threshold. Does the number of internships affect a student's ability to
secure a position? For this study, internships will be controlled for to eliminate effects
that might compete with or build upon the experience student-run firms might have on
students. Neidorf also looked at the participants’ experience at the student newspaper.
Fourteen of the 16 participants had experiences of varying intensity at the campus
newspaper. The author noted this experience as a way to gain semi-real-world
experience and work samples, which could help students obtain internships and jobs.

Lowrey and Becker (2004) asked if high school and college activities matter to a
commitment to journalistic work. Internships and campus media activities were the
strongest predictors of pursuing and finding work. These were considered socialization
variables. The authors suggest that college internships and activities are strong
predictors for pursuing journalistic work.
For an expanded search of internship experiences on students, other disciplines were explored. Researchers in accounting and business programs have looked at their internship programs. In a 1993 study, English and Koeppen found differences between the interning accounting students and those who didn’t intern on factors of classroom performance and GPA following the intern semester. The researchers looked at 57 matched pairs of students registered for a semester intern credit and those who were not. They were matched based on GPA and total course hours completed (only a 12-hour margin was allowed) before the study. The interns had higher GPAs after the internship semester than their non-internship counterparts. The difference was significant at the 0.05 level between interns and non-interns when it came to their overall GPA and accounting course grades after the internship semester.

Knouse, Tanner and Harris (1999) also looked at business students and the effects of internships. They surveyed more than 1,100 alumni from a large business school. The alumni who had completed internships received higher GPAs. Student ACT scores were used to determine differences between interns and non-interns before entering college. The groups were almost identical, according to the authors. It should be noted that Knechel and Snowball (1987) did not find significant difference between accounting interns and non-interns on the factor of overall GPA following an internship. The study looked at current students, not graduates. The author suggests that student motivation may have been a factor not measured or controlled for.

In a construction management program, researchers looked at structured internships on students at one institution. Hauck, Allen and Rondinelli (2000) found statistically significant (at 0.05 level) data for a decrease in GPA for the non-interns
(n=89) in the study. While the interns’ (n=60) GPA increased after the structured internship, it was not statistically significant.

Business majors in a 2004 study showed how internships correlate with securing a job. Callanan and Benzing used a survey of 163 seniors pursuing business degrees at a large public university to investigate internship and job correlations. They found a significant positive correlation (0.335) between internship completion and securing a job. They also reported the odds of securing a job for the majors completing internships were 4.43 times higher than the counterpart who did not complete an internship. In addition, researchers used regression analysis, which also pointed to internship completion as the most significant variable.

Gault, Redington and Schlager (2000) found that one advantage to internship experience for business undergraduates was a shorter time frame for obtaining the first post-graduation position. The researchers used a questionnaire to recent graduates to determine internship participation and entry-level career success. Using a sample of 437 from a single institution, they reported that the alumni who had an internship during college were able to obtain the first position more quickly (by about two months) than their non-internship counterparts.

Looking at management information systems (MIS) majors, Fang and Lee (2005) found that MIS majors with one MIS-related internship significantly helped secure full-time job offers in MIS (ANOVA, F=5.8; P=0.026). It was a single-institution study with 161 MIS seniors responding.
Engineering students with “high quality” work experience connected to their field reported more interviews and job offers than those with no work experience (Schuurman, Pangborn & McClintic, 2005). Data was recorded from 865 Penn State engineering students in a senior exit survey. The internship work experience was grouped into high, low and no experience. The high category referenced internships administered through the university’s co-op office that were part of the academic program. The quality of work experience had a main effect on job opportunities when researchers ran a multivariate analysis of variance.

In a single institution study of 218 graduates, Kysor and Pierce (2000) looked at internship/co-op students as a group, instead of by discipline. They found that internships (non-paid) and co-op (paid) experiences had no direct effect on graduates’ job search. But, they did show that graduates reporting the highest level of related experience between their academic major and their internship found employment (2.5 months) quicker than those reporting the lowest level of related experience (6.5 months). The internship/co-op experience itself showed no direct impact on students securing employment within their intended fields. Again, the graduates with the higher percentage of related experience were significantly more likely to have secured a first job in their intended field than the students with experience less related to their major. This showed true for respondents’ current jobs, too. In their search for a research site, Kysor and Pierce picked a four-year college where students could “still graduate in four years” and participate in up to 12 credits of experiential learning (p. 26). This research comes from an institution with an internship and co-op program for the college. The student-run public relations firm is very closely aligned with a future career in public
relations. It’s different than a business student interested in accounting taking a marketing internship because that was the option available from an institution’s internship office. One recommendation from the authors was for students to seek “major-related work experience.”

One hundred sixty-five seniors who sought career services assistance from a single university were the focus of a study on the relationship of career-related work and internship experiences (Brooks, Cornelius, Greenfield & Joseph, 1995). The seniors were majors from various departments: business, journalism, psychology and English. They concluded that internships and work activities with feedback, dealings with others and variety might help students progress through career development processes more so than work and internships without those elements. An advantage of the student-run firm is that advisers could make concerted efforts to give feedback, assignments with variety and opportunities for students to deal with others (including clients).

Other disciplines have their own nuances, but parallels can be drawn. Business, like journalism and public relations, is a pragmatic field. Knowledge and specific skills are taught in the higher education system to, in part, supply ready-to-work graduates to both fields. Benigni, Cheng and Cameron (2004) claim that research supports the assertion that students with “considerable ‘real-world’ application are more competitive in today’s job market” (p. 260). Neff, Walker, Smith and Creedon (1999) found that the most desired characteristics, by professionals and academics, for hiring recent public relations graduates were critical thinking, problem solving, writing and communication skills, and practical experience. Good attitude and self-starter were other qualities mentioned. The data comes from a national survey conducted for the 1998 National
Communication Association Summer Conference. Internships allow students to peek into the workplace and sometimes launch students into the category of working students.

Working Students

Students at the campus public relations firm are working students. This section will explore connections between working students, the public relations students and this study’s research questions.

Researchers for a study claiming to be the first to look at congruent work environment and importance in part-time jobs students held during college found that 48% of the 1,438 responding undergraduate students had jobs congruent with their career interests. The numbers drop when students reported how closely the job tied to their majors (14.9%) and career aspirations (16.3%) (Kane, Healy & Henson, 1992). The jobs congruent with student career interests showed statistically significance for students’ job satisfaction. The public relations firm provides these part-time positions inherently tied to majors and career aspirations. While job satisfaction is beyond the scope of this dissertation, students working for the campus public relations firm will not likely pursue similar employment after graduation if they do not experience some satisfaction in the campus work.

Cheng and Alcantara (2007) conducted focus group sessions with 14 students and made the proposition that working is a way for students to make college more meaningful. The small number of participants makes generalizations unwise, but it gives some guidance. They said that when students begin to find meaning in their work or
work meaningful it becomes a valuable part of the collegiate experience. Also suggested is that few universities look at student employment as an educational activity with experiential benefits. The student-run public relations firm creates this connection for students. It can be meaningful work that ties into collegiate studies of public relations. It is an experiential learning lab. The set-ups and qualities of the student-run firms would likely affect the degree of meaningful work. This will be qualified in this study by using a schema set forth by Bush (2009).

Healy and Mourton’s 1987 study looked at possible relationships between GPA and college jobs at a community college. Their findings suggest that the level of job held was directly related to GPA, when using path analysis. Higher level jobs were the ones researchers thought provided more development opportunities. The 212 participants in the study were enrolled in courses that would transfer to a baccalaureate institution and could be compared to their counterparts in the first and second years at a four-year institution. A critical difference between the Healy and Mourton study and journalism students is that most of these students worked off campus. Another concern is how many of the positions at the public relations firm would be classified as higher level. Based on examples in the study, most positions would be classified as high level.

Working students who are employed in positions tied to their career interests represent only part of the picture. About 80 percent of undergraduates in the U.S. worked while enrolled in college in 2000 (Tuttle, McKinney & Rago, 2005). Researchers tend to agree that a tipping point occurs between the hours of work being beneficial to students to becoming a hindrance to their academics somewhere between 15 and 20 hours a week (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The survey instrument for this study will
ask graduates to report the average weekly amount of hours they spent working at the student-run public relations firm. It will also show how many hours they spent working, not including the student-run firm or other internships.

Metcalf’s (2003) study of United Kingdom university students showed effects of student employment during the school term on academics. From four universities, a total of 782 third-year students responded to a survey and 30 percent of the students reported difficulties in juggling work and school. This percentage jumped to 64 percent when looking at the students who worked during “term-time.” This mostly affected study time, the author said. Some of the issues raised in this article will not be tackled in this study due to its scope. Those are the financial situations of students and characteristics of the universities that make them more or less accommodating to working students. The current study will look at graduates from multiple universities as two groups, those who worked for the student-run firm and those who didn’t. Future studies could take additional university characteristics into consideration, with one being a measure of a university’s atmosphere for working students.

Problem-based Learning

When students work at the student-run public relations firm, it could be likened to an extensive problem-based learning scenario. Hativa’s 2000 definition of problem-based learning (PBL) speaks to this. PBL is an instructional method based on “working in groups to achieve understanding or resolution of complex real-world problems” (p. 124). The student-run public relations firm is a model of a real-world public relations firm and students work to solve their clients’ communication problems. The desire to
solve these problems will motivate learners to seek the needed knowledge to do so, according to McKeachie (2006).

PBL focuses on the process more than the products of learning and creates a situation that is open-ended with no one correct solution (Hanney, 2005). There are a multitude of solutions that public relations firm students could find for their clients. Students at firms can see a problem from conception to completion and into the client's next project.

Problem-based learning came out of medical school education in the 1970s and spread to other collegiate areas (Savery & Duffy, 2001). Medical students are presented a patient with symptoms, a problem. The students must diagnose the patient and provide treatment recommendations. In a similar fashion, public relations students working for the campus agency are presented with clients who also need diagnosing. By listening to the client's communication situation, or symptoms, the students create a communication treatment.

Sixty students in three public relations courses at a Midwestern university participated in a study of problem-based learning. The students acted as public relations agencies for clients and were asked to view themselves as professional problem-solvers (Attansey, Okigbo & Schmidt, 2007). Using analysis of questionnaire responses and student evaluations, researchers asserted that students felt like they learned a lot and found "real-world applications appropriate for their needs" (p. 35). Student GPA, years to graduation and employment were not factors analyzed, but the positive
perceptions for parts of the problem-based learning process demonstrate a place for PBL in public relations education.

One PBL study that includes a career variable comes from a study of undergraduate medical students in the Netherlands (Cohen-Schotanus, Muijtjens, Schonrock-Adema, Geertsma & van der Vleuten, 2008). When the school changed from a conventional lecture method to a problem-based method, data was recorded for analysis. Researchers looked at how long it took for PBL students and traditional students to secure a postgraduate training in their preferred disciplines. This was one of the factors classified as career development. The students who had the PBL curriculum (n=169) took on average three months longer than graduates from the conventional curriculum (n=175) to find their place. This was a statistically significant difference. It is possible that those conducting interviews for the postgraduate positions were not as comfortable or familiar with the problem-based style exhibited by the interviewees. The researchers suggest that basic science knowledge rather than clinical competence was more critical to securing the limited number of postgraduate positions.

Vermunt pushes the discussion of problem-based learning to a “powerful learning environment” (2003, p. 121). One key to the powerful learning environment is that the problems presented to students become more complex. She mentions areas where a problem’s difficulty could be increased: clarity, structure, size, abstraction, number of facets, distance between current knowledge and that needed to solve the problem, and extraneous information. It is suggested that the difficulty of problems should be increased as a student progresses through curriculum. The “problems” a student would face through the student-run firm are not prepared problems, but actual real-life
communication scenarios that a client wants solved. They would vary in difficulty in the measures mentioned above. An adviser could pitch the easier problems, clients/campaigns to the more novice students at the firm, just like a teacher would increase the difficulty in a PBL situation.

Experiential Learning

Student work on the campus public relations firm is at its core experiential learning. Even in 1947, Lee noted that practical experience, along with motivation, were more important than certain education to producing public relations leaders of the time. Experiential learning, as defined by Kolb (1984), is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). Hativa characterizes experiential learning by saying that “knowing and doing are connected” (2000, p. 129). With some guidance, students feel their way around a simulated work environment for their chose fields. Experiential learning is a “sequence of events with one or more identified learning objectives, requiring active involvement by participants” (Walter & Marks, 1981, p. 1). They key is the participant’s involvement. Experiential learning helps expand a minimal, but growing, experience base for undergraduates.

John Dewey, a champion for learning through experiences, said students learn best by experiencing the problems that surround them (Ehrlich, 1997). He said every experience is a “moving force” (Dewey, 1938, p. 38). But an experience to Dewey is an interaction where something is learned (Campbell, 1995). The experience can educate or mis-educate. And the experiences lay groundwork for the next experience. They are not accumulated individually, but integrate with previous experiences.
Experiential learning happens inside and outside of the classroom. Cohen (1988) outlines how students are guided through the writing process by attending campus theater, modern dance concerts and art exhibits as part of an undergraduate class titled Media and the Arts. “The lesson, however, is learned in a considerably deeper way when the novice writer actually has to struggle with the process of both observing the movement and then putting those observations into clear prose” (Cohen, p. 51).

Gibbons and Hopkins (1980) surmised that education settings have experiential learning components, but some would have more than others. For example, one could assume that managing the student-run public relations firm has more inherent experiential learning than what occurs in a traditional classroom. Gibbons and Hopkins created a scale of experientiality where simulated experiences, like viewing slides or pictures, are on lower end of the scale. As more of the planning and execution of the experience moves into the learner’s responsibility, the experience becomes more experiential on their scale. In the firm setting, students are meeting with clients and making decisions about what messages to distribute, how and when. It is also possible that levels of student experiential learning would differ between student-run public relations firms.

Rhodes and Roessner (2009) looked at experiential learning in magazine publishing courses within journalism schools. Using interviews and questionnaires, the researchers analyzed how teachers were using experiential learning in magazine published classes. From the 16 identified schools with magazine publishing courses, they determined teachers were using one of four models, which varied in scope. At one end was the student experience of an individual creating a magazine from concept to
prototype. At the other end were students working on an existing real-life, published magazine. Rhodes and Roessner assert the strength of all of the models is that their students have the confidence needed to enter the magazine industry, even in competitive markets. A limitation of the study was it did not measure if experiential learning correlated with higher achievement.

Like the campus newspaper or public relations firm, the campus TV newscast is also a laboratory for learning the business. Duhe and Zukowski (1997) asked a mixed group of academics \( n=36 \) and television news directors \( n=84 \) about broadcast curriculum and laboratory learning. Ninety-two percent of the directors agreed that more experience equals a higher likelihood of securing the first TV news job. The same percentage of academics agreed. Respondents selected a curriculum model they thought would best prepare students. The academics and news directors selected a curriculum with the highest number of hours with hands-on laboratory learning. The curriculum most selected was a capstone semester where a five-day-a-week news laboratory was key. The curriculum model included 18 to 24 hours of journalism courses, 12 hours of lab hours in TV news and 90 hours of non-journalism courses.

In a pilot study in the U.K., journalism educators created an experiential learning situation where journalism and political science postgraduate students worked together to cover a general election (Steel et al., 2007). Through student interviews, researchers collected student response to the experiential learning project. Student comments revealed a few themes such as anxiety, confidence, working in groups, convergence, and the pressures and realities of really covering the election. They cited anxiety at first that eventually transitioned to a greater confidence. Students saw how even a group
with some problems can effectively cover a news event when team members focus on the same goal. The exercise also gave the students a taste for convergence, the concept that distinctions between news delivery vehicles (broadcast, print, Web) are vanishing. Brooks, Kennedy, Moen and Ranly (2010) describe convergence as the “coordination of print, broadcast and online reporting in a news operation.”

Experiential learning has an impact on careers, according to a 1995 study. Feldman analyzed survey responses from 1,345 newspaper journalists looking for connections between early experiential learning and career paths. The regression coefficient for those working for the college newspaper and securing a job within the first year was 0.923 (p< .01). The author suggests that exposure to journalism (through vehicles like high school and college newspaper work) while in school increases a student’s chance of working as a journalist and the likelihood of securing a job. This participation in journalistic activities can be likened to public relations. The parallel would be that students who participated in early public relations activities like a student-run firm might be more likely to secure a position earlier.

Career Market

Part of this study was scheduled to look at graduate employment within their intended field. The Dow Jones Newspaper Fund, Inc. reported that 53 percent of journalism-mass communication graduates found traditional media jobs in 1982. Ten percent of this group found employment in public relations. In 1991, the number of graduates reporting employment was only 22%, and 2% was in public relations agencies (Fröhlich & Holtz-Bacha, 2003). One concern about this number is that it may
exclude corporate public relations and other public relations positions not in an agency setting.

In a 1992 study, only 25 percent of respondents thought the public relations major was the best preparation for a public relations career. The study was sponsored by the Public Relations Society of America and sought attitudes from public relations professionals and CEOs of the top 50 firms (Dickson, 2000). Respondents rated areas important in public relations education. Eighty-nine percent rated internships and work experience as very important (Dickson, 2000).

Fewer than 20 percent of public relations majors secured jobs in their field, according to a 1993 report by Duncan, Caywood and Newsom (Dickson, 2000, p. 241). The Bureau of Labor Statistic forecasts that employment for public relations specialists will increase 18 percent from 2006 to 2016, but also predicted the competition for entry-level positions will be "keen" (Job Outlook, 2008).

“Other Curriculum”

George Kuh called the out-of-class experience in college the “other curriculum” (Kuh, 1995). He said out-of-class experiences influence student learning and development. The experiences a student might have at the student-run public relations firm would count as the other curriculum. Interviewing seniors at 12 institutions (N=149), Kuh sought information about out-of-class experiences. One finding pertinent to this study is that out-of-class experiences helped students clarify their vocational goals. Kuh warned that findings should not be overly generalized because the participating institutions provide “high-quality out-of-class learning opportunities” (p. 144). Another
observation was the varied number, nature and quality of the experiences mentioned by participants. This note is worth mentioning because of the myriad of influences and other curriculum each student will endure as part of his or her undergraduate experience. This study aims to compare students with the “other curriculum” experience of working for the student-run public relations firm and those without, while acknowledging that more forces are at work on student development and learning.

Conclusion

This review of literature explored areas of research that touch on aspects closely related to experiences at the student public relations firm: journalism education, internships, comparisons to campaigns courses, working students, problem-based learning and experiential learning. As a composite, they provide a framework for this study. Scant studies specific to student-run public relations agencies make it necessary to pull from different bodies of research to create a starting point. The student-run public relations firm is part of journalism education. It is experiential learning, a problem-based scenario, an internship and sometimes service learning. The students at the firms belong to the working student subpopulation. All of these factors and more help paint a theoretical backdrop for study. The multitude of influences makes the student-run firm, and other student-run media endeavors, difficult to study in isolated parts. This study aimed to break off a small piece to add to public relations pedagogical research.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study was a mixed method approach. Quantitative data and qualitative descriptions were collected from advisers and recent graduates from public relations programs in U.S. institutions of higher education with student-run public relations agencies. The research design attempted to answer the following research questions:

1: What are the common characteristics of student-run firms at institutions of higher education in the U.S.?

2: What benefits of agency work experience for the undergraduate students do the advisers of student-run public relations agencies report?

3: What observations do the advisers of student-run public relations agencies report on student learning?

4: What observations do the advisers of student-run public relations agencies report on career development?

5: Do student-run firms group into three types as proposed by Bush (2009)?

6: Is there a significant difference between types (Bush, 2009) and

- firms’ years in operation?
• student involvement?
• average number of hours students work at firm per week
• firms within ACEJMC accredited programs?

To search for universities with student-run public relations firms, a benchmarking study was conducted. It began with a basic Google search for student-run public relations firms in early 2009. This search resulted in some colleges and universities that were not listed on the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) accredited journalism program list. Next the Web sites for programs on the ACEJMC list were searched for student-run public relations firms. Typically, this information was found on the public relations page, student media page or student organization page. If information was not found in these places, the researcher looked at the faculty list for an adviser for such a firm. The student newspaper search engine was also used to locate mention of student-run public relations firms. In discussions about this research, colleagues suggested universities from their recollections that had student-run firms. If a colleague had a recollection of a student-run firm at a particular institution, the university’s Web site was checked. In one case, information on the university’s Web site was inconclusive, so an e-mail was sent to verify whether or not it had a firm. It did not. Information was entered into an Excel spreadsheet for evaluation. The list was coded so it could be sorted to differentiate the programs from accredited journalism programs (ACEJMC) and non-accredited programs.

The list created by the benchmarking project was compared to the listing of student-run firms kept by the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA).
According to PRSSA Director of Education Jeneen Garcia, this listing is created by a self-report feature on the PRSSA membership form. The respondent simply checks a box to denote if the school has a student-run public relations firm.

The benchmarking study revealed a varying degree of development among the student-run public relations firms. Some firms were long-standing institutions with numerous clients from surrounding areas. Other firms were much younger, launching within the last year. Some limited the number of clients or types of clients, like only campus organizations or community nonprofits. A few firms were more like clubs that lasted for a semester or an academic year or were really teams created to enter students into public relations competitions. Bush’s 2009 qualitative study on public relations firms addressed this observation and was used to classify the firms into types.

The benchmarking study and comparison with the PRSSA list of universities with student-run public relations firms created the sample from which the study began. The Fashion Institute was excluded from the list because its academic structure was unlike the other universities. Contact information for the 120 universities and their student-run public relations advisers was compiled from PRSSA online information, university Web sites and phone calls as necessary. If multiple faculty members served as the advisers, each one was included in the sample for the adviser part of this study. The population for the adviser phase of the study was the 120 firms in the U.S. and the sample simply consisted of the survey respondents. The questionnaire sent to advisers helped to identify which universities would be willing to participate in the graduate survey part of the study. The population for that phase was public relations graduates in the United
States from selected universities and the sample contained those graduates reported to
the researcher by their institution who responded to the questionnaire.

Two questionnaires were created for this study using Alreck and Settle’s survey
handbook (1995) as a guideline. One was administered to the faculty advisers for
information about the student-run public relations firm. Questions were crafted to learn
more about that particular student-run firm, like when it was established, how many
students typically work there each semester and its primary client base. One function of
the adviser survey was to find institutions willing to help connect this researcher with
their graduates in order to administer the other survey instrument. The adviser
instrument also had questions designed to determine how much students direct the
firm’s business. Essentially, the researcher looked for levels of student involvement to
better divide the firms into groups based on Bush’s 2009 schema. Firms in her study fell
into three categories. Items like types of clients, whether or not the firm had a written
policy manual, whether or not student workers had titles, dedicated office space and
application process divided the firms into types along a continuum.

Information gathered through this questionnaire was used to build the list of
universities asked to participate in the student questionnaire. The ability to contact
recent graduates from public relations programs was one main qualifier. The
questionnaire provided information needed to administer the companion graduate
survey. If the firm had only been in operation for one year, there may not be any
graduates yet to survey. In order to pull from a larger starting spot, accredited and non-
accredited journalism programs were included.
The questionnaire was submitted to a panel of experts to look at its validity. The panel included one public relations educator with extensive professional experience; one award-winning accredited public relations practitioner who managed the intern program at a public relations firm; an advertising professional and educator who advises an advertising campaigns team that consistently places in national competitions; a scholar from University of North Texas’ Center for Interdisciplinary Research and Analysis; and an educator and scholar from another discipline who has experience with national survey administration. The panelists reviewed, modified and improved the questionnaires. A memo outlining changes made is in the appendix.

A student questionnaire was developed to gather statistics on recent public relations graduates asking questions about their job search, internships held during college, experience at the student-run public relations firm and demographic information. Becker’s annual survey of journalism graduates was loosely used as a model for the creation of this instrument. This questionnaire was submitted to the same panel members for feedback. Comments were used to make improvements to the survey and clarify questions.

After survey instruments were crafted and evaluated, Institutional Review Board approval was sought and was approved August 11, 2009. A pilot study was then conducted by administering the questionnaire at a school not selected to participate in the larger study. The sample was a convenience sample from a private university in the Southwest. The pilot university requested its own IRB protocol to be followed. A protocol was submitted and IRB approval was granted. To satisfy the dissertation-granting university’s IRB protocol, the pilot site representative submitted a letter of participation.
that was forwarded to the University of North Texas IRB. The pilot university provided a list of College of Communication graduates. The list was sorted for advertising and public relations majors and for graduation years. The most recent graduates reported on the list were from 2008. Graduates who did not have an e-mail reflected in the database were deleted. Graduates from the following years were sent an e-mail invitation to participate in the study: 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008. The e-mail invitation had a hyperlink taking the participant to the online questionnaire. By clicking on a link, they hyperlinked to the notice of consent screen. Respondents “clicked” their consent and the survey screen appeared. The online survey system and e-mail message link were checked before the survey was administered.

The researcher kept track of undeliverable e-mails. If an automated response was received with an updated e-mail address, the invitation was sent to the new e-mail address. This happened with five of the e-mails. The adviser for the pilot study university’s firm was e-mailed an invitation to participate in the adviser questionnaire, which was completed. The adviser’s responses would classify this firm as Type 1. The students share in the decision-making process “some.” The student involvement metric, which is explained later in this chapter, was 15.

Results from Pilot Study

Of the 49 responses to the survey, 47 were complete. One of the 49 reported being a graduate student instead of an undergraduate. With 46 usable responses, the response rate was 16 percent. One e-mail invitation was sent and responses were collected for one week. Only two of the 46 represented graduates reported working for
the student-run public relations firm. This makes it unrealistic to run the comparison statistics between the students working for the student-run firm and those who did not.

With that said, the results showed that the two students who worked for the firm graduated in 3.5 and 4 years. The average years to graduation for the non-firm workers was 4.25. The mode was at the four-year mark. The reported GPAs for the students working at the student-run firm were 3.87 and 3.79. The average GPA for the non-workers was 3.25. On the career attainment question, one of the graduates who worked at the firm headed to advanced study and the other reported securing a full-time position in public relations within three months of graduation. That respondent is currently employed in the public relations sector. Of the students not working at the firm, 28 responded that they were not seeking a full-time position in public relations after graduation. Of the non-firm students seeking full-time public relations employment, 12 graduates reported finding a full-time position within three months of graduation. One graduate was employed by six months, one by 10 months, one by 12 months and two more than 12 months. The general demographics of all respondents was predominantly female and white.

The researcher looked at the data from the perspective of whether or not the questions worked as planned. Twelve respondents did not report the year in which they enrolled in college, but gave data for how many years it took to complete their undergraduate degree. Between that question and the ones about starting college and graduating, most responses should be able to be used. Some of the questions specific to the students who worked for the student-run firm are duplicates from questions that were asked of their adviser. The two students who fit this category marked the same
selections as their adviser. While it may have been unnecessary to have this duplication, the questions were not changed for the study’s survey administration.

Changes to Study Based on Pilot Study

Based on the pilot administration, the following areas received attention in subsequent administrations of the survey. The researcher was prepared to secure IRB approval from the participating universities in order to obtain access to their graduates. The list of graduates from the pilot study had at least one master’s student reflected. In requests for graduate contacts, the researcher emphasized the fact that only the institutions undergraduate public relations majors were wanted. A filter question to eliminate non-undergraduates from the participating university was considered, but was not added. It seemed redundant when the beginning questions specifically asked about undergraduate attendance.

The accuracy of e-mails originating from the host institutions was a problem. For the pilot study, many of the e-mails looked like accounts the students would have had while undergraduates. It was unknown if graduates still checked this account or had it forwarded to another account. For the pilot study, e-mails were sent out of the researcher’s account. It was assumed that sending them through the researcher’s account at the doctoral-granting university would provide credibility to the e-mail and prevent e-mails from going to spam folders. Keeping track of undeliverable messages was cumbersome. For subsequent administrations of the study, the e-mail invitations to participate were submitted through the automated online survey system used for the questionnaire. This automated the process in an effort to minimize the possibility for human error.
Securing enough responses from students who worked for the student-run firms was an issue. At the pilot university, fewer than 36 graduates of the 424 public relations majors had experience working for the firm.

Open-ended questions were added to both the adviser and graduate questionnaires to provide more data to analyze in case response rates were weaker than needed to run statistical analyses. The original panelists were asked to review the revised questionnaires. Four of the five panelists responded and their suggestions were incorporated. Three questions were added to the adviser instrument: 1) What observed transformations do you see in the students working at the student-run firm from their first day working at the firm to their leaving the firm? 2) What value, if any, did the student workers gain through their experiences at the student-run firm? 3) In your observation, how did the student experience at the student-run firm assist or hinder post-graduation job attainment? The following questions were added to the graduate version of the questionnaire: 1) What did you like about your experiences at the student-run public relations firm? 2) What did you dislike about your experiences at the student-run public relations firm? 3) What did you learn while working at the student-run public relations firm? 4) What career insights did you gain while working at the student-run public relations firm? 5) How do you think your student-run agency experiences affected your grade point average (GPA)? and 6) How do you think your student-run agency experiences affected your ability to secure full-time employment in public relations? It was not necessary to change the estimated time it would require respondents to take the survey because the researcher overestimated the timing for the IRB paperwork. In
the online survey system, pilot study respondents were recorded as finishing the original survey in about half of the time estimated.

Administration of Adviser Instrument

After the pilot test, an online questionnaire mechanism was used to collect responses from the faculty advisers. The adviser instrument was sent to the advisers’ e-mail addresses from the compiled database of adviser contact information for universities with student-run public relations firms. E-mails and the survey instrument were uploaded to www.surveymonkey.com. After the first invitation was sent, the researcher checked for undeliverable e-mail addresses. Updated or alternative e-mails were entered. For respondents who had previously opted to not receive any e-mails sent through www.surveymonkey.com, an e-mail invitation was sent through the researcher’s university e-mail account. The same invitation message was used. Four subsequent e-mail reminders were sent over a two month time frame. Forty-six responded.

One round of phone calls was made to those who had not responded to e-mails. The researcher offered to take responses over the phone. One was handled in this manner. When voice mail was left, a follow-up e-mail from the researcher’s university account was sent to the respondent. Phone calls and voice mail messages with a follow-up e-mail solicited another 16 responses.

Questionnaires were analyzed for completeness. Two incomplete surveys were kept in the dataset because there was value in analyzing the responses they did make. Two of the survey respondents for the adviser instrument reported no firm at their
institutions. Those universities were deleted from the list. Five cases were deleted for noncompletion. One adviser sent the adviser instrument to former students. These two were struck from the adviser database. Two advisers from the same university responded, but one responded in the additional comments section that she was not the adviser. Responses from the two were similar. The non-adviser’s comments were deleted from the study. One university has two firms, so both advisers’ responses were included in the study. Fifty-five usable surveys of the 119 possible means 46 percent of firms are represented.

Administration of Graduate Instrument

A graduate questionnaire for each university participating in the graduate portion was uploaded to www.surveymonkey.com and tested. Advisers who said they would be willing to help the researcher connect with the university’s graduates were contacted via e-mail. A typical response to the follow-up e-mail requesting a connection to the graduates was that advisers would be happy to send e-mails addresses of their firm’s graduates, but this did not include the non-workers for comparisons.

Some responded that their e-mail lists were spotty or incomplete. One said, “I can maybe find the contacts for a few graduates, but I don’t have a comprehensive database with contacts for all of them.” Others said they would like to have graduates participate in study, but the firms were too new to have yet have graduates. Bias is an issue in these survey administrations. One adviser e-mailed students asking them participate by contacting the researcher. Self-selection issues exist. Several universities would not agree to connect with graduates because of privacy concerns and internal policies. It was anticipated that administering the graduate version of the study could be
problematic. Graduates in the past six years was the original target, but this delimitation was removed when data sets became hard to obtain.

One concern was that enough graduates would not respond, including those who worked for the student-run firm and those who didn’t. This concern became a reality. Of the very few graduates targeted, only six completed surveys could be used. A true response rate is difficult to devise because of the various ways in which potential respondents were found. Thirty graduate e-mails were entered into the survey system, making the response rate 20 percent.

Data Analysis

Data was exported from www.surveymonkey.com into PASW® Statistics GradPack 18. Variables were defined and the database was cleaned. Descriptive statistics were run. The sample size and other details will be reported in the results section. An alpha of 0.05 was used in the data analysis. Frequency tables and scatter plots were run to look for outliers, anomalies, or possible input errors.

Data analysis of the adviser survey aimed to create a clearer overall picture of student-run public relations firms. General descriptives add to the body of research and are explained in the next chapter. Other data clean-up and coding is described below. Where advisers reported ranges, the mean was used. For example some advisers reported spending 20-25 percent of their week working with the firm; 22.5 was used for analysis. The same was true for the number of years the firms have been in existence.

For questions with an “other” response, adviser comments were analyzed and categorized. One such question was, What is the primary workspace for the student-run
public relations firm? a. Dedicated office space, b. Shared space with other student organizations, c. No Space, d. Other (please explain). Other workspace options expressed by the advisers were department labs, conference rooms, empty classrooms and other spaces. These were deemed “shared space” by the researcher. In future administrations of this instrument, the shared space could be more inclusive. Some respondents reported that students worked from their residences. Responses like these were classified as no space.

Supplied responses for how are students paid for work at the student-run public relations firm were handled in a similar way. If a respondent said “credit hours and a few scholarships” the case was coded into the category paid in credit hours. Another example was that most are unpaid, but the executive director receives three credit hours of practicum. In this case, credit hours would have been entered. A category was added for cooperative payment accounts where students can use monies for travel and professional development. In subsequent administrations a question should be added to qualify which students, or what percentage of students, are compensated.

How is the firm primarily funded? The “other” response option produced new categories that were added as the data was coded in PASW®. PRSSA or student dues, a combination of university funds and client fees, no funding, and fundraisers were added. One respondent reported that the firm was taught as a class; the funding was classified as university funds.

Advisers were asked to respond to how often students handled certain firm responsibilities. The question was an effort to determine student involvement to create a
metric of how student-run the firm actually was. Advisers responded never, rarely, sometimes, often, or always to how often students 1) are involved in the firm’s planning; 2) are involved in the financial aspect of the firm; 3) negotiate with clients; 4) handle client complaints; and 5) solicit new clients. Reliability analysis was run for the five elements used to create the student involvement metric. The Cronbach alpha was 0.828. The Cronbach alphas for each item, if deleted, were similar, so no item was deleted from the metric. The metric was also coded into high, medium and low involvement. Scores from 9-12 were low, 13-16 were medium and 17-20 were high.

Firm Classifications

The student-run public relations agencies were classified into one of Bush’s types. Questions on the adviser survey were designed to help classify the firms. For example, questions about having a written policy manual, types of clients and designated office space helped to classify the firms in the types identified by Bush (2009). This was not meant to be an exact replication of Bush’s study, but used parts of her typology schema to classify the firms. The type was coded into the public relations graduate database and the adviser database.

More specifically, a separate spreadsheet was started for dividing the firms into types. The following questions were used to determine each quality that was counted toward the larger variable of firm type:

- What is the primary workspace for the student-run public relations firm?
- Does the student-run firm have a written policy or employee manual?
- How are students paid for work at the student-run public relations firm?
- Do students have titles when working for the firm? If yes, what position or titles can students occupy at the student-run public relations firm? Mark all that apply.
- How are students selected to work for the student-run firm?
- What is the primary type of client your firm serves?
- On average, what percentage of YOUR (adviser) week is devoted to the student-run public relations firm? (Please give a percentage.)

Table 1 outlines how responses from the seven questions were used to classify the student-run firms into types.

Table 1

*How Firms in Study Were Divided Into Types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type 1</th>
<th>Type 2</th>
<th>Type 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary workspace as dedicated space</td>
<td>Primary workspace is shared</td>
<td>No primary workspace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a written policy or employee manual</td>
<td></td>
<td>No written policy or employee manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students paid an hourly wage, credit hours, stipend or a combination of these</td>
<td>Students can access a cooperative account for travel or professional development</td>
<td>Students are not paid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 1</td>
<td>Type 2</td>
<td>Type 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students have titles like account coordinator,</td>
<td>Students have titles like intern, secretary,</td>
<td>Students do not have titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>account executive, area-specific titles, assistant account executive</td>
<td>treasurer or associate; lacking hierarchical titles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and executive director</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are handpicked by faculty or through a competitive</td>
<td>A noncompetitive application/audition/interview process is used</td>
<td>Firm participation is open access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>application/audition/interview process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary clients include area businesses and national/international</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clients are nonprofits, campus departments, or pre-packaged/simulated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clients, or a mix including these</td>
<td></td>
<td>clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisers reported spending 50-100 percent of their week devoted to</td>
<td>Advisers spent 20-49 percent of week devoted to firm</td>
<td>Advisers spent 0-19 percent of week devoted to firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>firm</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Predictive discriminant analysis (PDA) was used to test rater consistency. PDA can be used to determine a classification role for assigning units into groups (Huberty, Wisenbaker, & Smith, 1987). PASW® was used to run the analysis, with syntax coding used to produce casewise statistics. The seven items were loaded with the rater’s type assignment. The hit rate was 65.9 and the I index (effect size) was 0.49 (Huberty & Lowan, 2000). Results were from the cross-validated report, which uses the leave-one-out method. Reviewing the casewise report, 17 of the 43 firms were labeled as misclassified cases. The rater reviewed cases for inconsistencies. In all but one case, the secondary selection by the statistical analysis matched the rater’s original type. These were cases that were “on the fence” using the rater’s schema. The one case that did not seem to be within range was an odd case. It was even parts Type 1, Type 2 and Type 3 and was therefore classified as Type 2. After a case-by-case analysis, no changes were made.

Cluster analysis and multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) were statistical measures used to see if the firms represented in this study clustered in a particular manner. Cluster analysis is designed to suggest how clusters form in the data based on input variables. The program, R, an open source software, along with FactoMineR (Le, Josse & Husson, 2008) was used to run MCA analyses. MCA has other names, like homogeneity analysis; it essentially analyzes data with categorical variables for relationships (Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010). Four cases, with partial data, were deleted from the dataset for MCA, because they were consistently plotting as outliers and distorting the data. Two were firms that could not be connected to their universities.
One-way ANOVAs were run to test hypotheses about differences between types on variables like years established and student involvement. ANOVA is a technique for determining the difference between mean scores (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Null hypotheses were formed so the ANOVA would tell if there was a difference between groups. Using PASW®, homogeneity of variances and post hoc tests were checked. An alpha of 0.05 was used. Data analysis of graduates consisted of simply running descriptive statistics like frequencies using PASW® because of the small n. Results are reported in the next chapter. Descriptive data collected from the open-ended questions were printed and reviewed for re-occurring comments to produce themes. Themes were checked by reviewing the adviser responses a second time. The researcher looked for commonalities and differences. Although objectivity was the goal in assessing the comments, it should be noted that the researcher herself was a student worker for a campus newspaper for multiple semesters. The experience was a positive one where practical learning happened. The researcher also uses experiential learning methods in her courses. The methods and procedures outlined in this chapter aimed to provide a framework for investigating research questions about student-run public relations firms.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Results for the study are divided into the following categories: descriptives about the participating universities and their firms, typologies for the firms, analysis of the types using cluster analysis and multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), ANOVA results comparing types using certain variables and a qualitative section with themes presented by advisers from open-ended questions. The first section aims to answer the research question: what are the common characteristics of student-run firms at institutions of higher education in the U.S.?

About the Universities

Of the 55 adviser responses, all but one could be identified and therefore connected to institutional data. As shown in Table 2, more public institutions ($n=35$) were represented in the study. More of the respondents ($n=32$) represented universities with communications programs not accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC). Two firms came from the same university, an accredited public institution.
Table 2

**Characteristics of Responding Universities with Student-Run Public Relations Firms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accredited</th>
<th>ACEJMC</th>
<th>Not Accredited</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Institutions</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Institutions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 54; one university from the dataset is not reflected here because the adviser's incomplete survey could not be aligned with its corresponding university. ACEJMC is the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.*

**About the Firms**

The length of operation for firms was from the newest beginning in 2009 to 37 years. The mean number of years was 9.36 years (n=51, SD=9.45). Twenty-two of the firms have been in existence four years or less and 15 of those were established in 2008 or 2009. Table 3 shows firms’ years of operation.

Table 3

**Years Firms Have Been in Operation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in Operations</th>
<th>No. of Firms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4 years</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9 years</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14 years</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 or more years</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of firms (44 of the 53 responding) reported operating in a continuous manner. Nine advisers said there was a period when firms did not operate. Advisers offered explanations for the hiatus. One said a lack of an active adviser led to periods of inactivity for firms. Another adviser said his firm was suspended for a two-year period due to a lack of qualified participants. Lack of interest from students and clients was cited by one adviser for a hiatus. Others responded they did not know because of limited time in the adviser position.

Firms were funded in a variety of ways, as Table 4 shows. Client fees, university funds and a combination of those two were the most frequently cited.

Table 4

_How Firms are Primarily Funded_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Source</th>
<th>No. of Firms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not funded</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University funds</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant/foundations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client fees</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private donations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRSSA or student dues</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of university funds and client fees</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraisers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The primary workspace for firms was almost divided into thirds between dedicated office space \((n=20)\), shared space \((n=16)\) and no space \((n=17)\). Thirty-six firms reported having written policy manuals.

Almost half of the firms have an open access process for “hiring” student workers. The next most frequent response was a competitive application process as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Selection Process</th>
<th>No. of Firms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open access</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive application/audition/interview process</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-competitive process</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of methods</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRSSA elections/membership</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course enrollment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 shows how students are compensated for their work at the firm. The majority of student firms do not pay students for their work.
Table 6

*How Students are Compensated for their Work at the Student-run Public Relations Firm*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compensation Method</th>
<th>No. of Firms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not paid</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of wage, credit, stipend</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid in credit hours</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid an hourly wage</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative account for student travel and professional development</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stipend</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average number of students working at the firm each semester or quarter ranged from four to 125 \((n=50, \text{SD}=19.06)\) with a mean of 19.4. Advisers reported students spending between one and five semesters working at the firm. The mean was 2.42 semesters \((n=46, \text{SD}=0.98)\).

Only one responding university did not use titles in its firm structure. Table 7 shows the frequencies for the titles firms do use.
Table 7

Frequency of Positions and Titles Students Occupy at Student-run Public Relations Firms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position/Title</th>
<th>No. of Firms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Account executive</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive director/director</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area specific titles</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant account executive</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account coordinator</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intern</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondent added “other” titles. Associate was another title used that would be similar to account executive. President, vice president, freelancer, editor, account supervisor and manager showed up in a couple of firms.

Firms handled accounts for a variety of clients. The average number of clients per semester/quarter was 5.41 with the least amount of clients at one and the most at 25 (n=52, SD=4.627). Table 8 shows that about half of the firms have community nonprofits as their primary client. Of the 11 firms reporting a mix of primary clients, one reported having a national client and two were a mix of campus organizations and
community nonprofits. One received referrals of start-up businesses from the Small Business Development Center.

Table 8

*Firms’ Primary Client Types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Type of Client</th>
<th>No. of Firms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community nonprofits</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus departments or organizations</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mix of types</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area businesses</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advisers were asked to what degree students share in the decision-making process. Forty-one of the 54 respondents said “all” and 13 said “some.” Advisers were asked to divulge how often students handled certain aspects of the firm’s business. Table 9 shows that the majority of advisers responded students “always” were involved in the firm’s planning and handling client complaints.
Table 9

*Frequency of Tasks Handled by Students Working at the Student-run Firm as Reported by Advisers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are involved in firm's planning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=53)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are involved in the financial aspects of the firm (n=52)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiate with clients (n=53)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handle client complaints (n=53)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicit new clients (n=52)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When these variables were summed for a total reflecting student involvement (never=0, rarely=1, sometimes=2, often=3, always=4), the lowest student involvement was a 9 and the highest was 20 (mean=16.39, mode=18, SD=3.578). As stated in the previous chapter, this metric was checked for reliability, using reliability analysis in PASW®, and the five variables had a Cronbach alpha of 0.828.
The majority of advisers are full-time university employees \((n=50\text{ of }53)\) and are assistant \((n=16)\) and associate \((n=16)\) professors. Nine were lecturers or instructors, 4 were adjuncts, 2 staff, 5 full professors, and 4 professionals in residence.

Table 10 divides firms into categories of firm age to compare qualities by highlighting the most frequent adviser responses. Firms are largely similar when viewed in this manner.

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm Characteristics by Years in Operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Years Firms Have Been Operating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a written policy manual ((n=36))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not have a written policy manual ((n=13))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How majority of students are paid ((n=50))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary workspace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How students selected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary type of clients served</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of adviser workweek devoted to firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student involvement metric for student-run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Table shows most frequent responses from adviser questionnaire. Hierarchical titles references account coordinator, account executive, area-specific titles, assistant account executive and executive director.
Using the methodology explained in the previous chapter, the firms were grouped into types using Bush’s 2009 schema. Two respondents did not provide enough data to classify their firms. The other 53 fell into these types: 20 as Type 1, 20 as Type 2, and 13 as Type 3. Table 11 shows the institution type and how many firms, grouped by type, were part of an accredited program.

Table 11

Firms Types Shown with Institution Type and Program Accreditation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not accredited</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accredited</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Firm characteristics were analyzed by firm type. Characteristics showcased in Table 12 were not used to classify the firm’s into Bush’s types. For years in operation, average number of clients, funding source, and average number of semesters students work at the firm, types show similarities.
Table 12

**Most Prominent Characteristics of Firms by Type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Type 1</th>
<th>Type 2</th>
<th>Type 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years in operation</strong></td>
<td>0-4 years $(n=10)$</td>
<td>0-4 years $(n=7)$,</td>
<td>0-4 years $(n=5)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$(n=50)$</td>
<td></td>
<td>15+ years $(n=6)$,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5-9 years $(n=5)$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average number of</strong></td>
<td>0-3 clients $(n=6)$,</td>
<td>0-3 clients $(n=10)$,</td>
<td>0-3 clients $(n=7)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>clients per</strong></td>
<td>4-7 clients $(n=6)$</td>
<td>4-7 clients $(n=7)$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>semester $(n=51)$</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding $(n=53)$</strong></td>
<td>Client fees $(n=9)$</td>
<td>Client fees $(n=7)$,</td>
<td>Client fees $(n=3)$,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>university funding $(n=7)$</td>
<td>university funding $(n=3)$,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>not funded $(n=3)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average student</strong></td>
<td>7-14 hours $(n=11)$</td>
<td>0-6 hours $(n=10)$,</td>
<td>0-6 $(n=10)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>hours worked per</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>7-14 hours $(n=9)$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>week $(n=52)$</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average no. of</strong></td>
<td>2 semesters $(n=7)$,</td>
<td>2 semesters $(n=8)$,</td>
<td>2 semesters $(n=4)$,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>semesters students</strong></td>
<td>3 semesters $(n=5)$</td>
<td>3 semesters $(n=5)$</td>
<td>3 semesters $(n=3)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>work $(n=45)$</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Public Relations Society of America provides a certification review process for undergraduate public relations programs. Seven firms in this study are housed in programs with PRSA certification. Three were coded as Type 1, two as Type 2 and one as Type 3. Five of the certified programs’ firms are funded by client fees. Four do not have dedicated space and two do. Four have written policy manuals.

Analysis of variance was used to compare firm qualities between the types (Bush, 2009). Using a null hypothesis of $H_0=\text{Type 1}=\text{Type 2}=\text{Type 3}$, years of operation and student involvement were tested. Both variables passed tests of homogeneity, but n's for the three types (Type 1 $n=19$, Type 2 $n=20$, Type 3 $n=11$) were not evenly distributed. ANOVAs were run despite this fact. Neither variable was statistically significant and failed to reject the null hypothesis. Eta-squares were small, too. For years in operation, eta-square was 0.037 ($F=0.91$) and student involvement was 0.018 ($F=0.44$). ANOVAs producing statistically significant results were for the average number of hours students worked per week ($F=6.612$, eta-square= 0.18) and ACEJMC accreditation ($F=3.71$, eta-square=0.13). Both variables passed tests of homogeneity; Tukey post-hoc analysis was used.

To test research question 5, do student-run firms group into three types as proposed by Bush (2009), two-step cluster analysis using PASW® was employed to see how the data collected would group. Using the seven items selected to classify firms into Bush’s types, the cluster analysis results for a predetermined three cluster set-up was rated as poor. Because cluster analysis creates clusters based on distance and not relationship or correlation, multiple correspondence analysis was run in program R. When the seven selection variables, used to group the firms into Bush’s types, were
used in MCA, a three-cluster plot emerged. The numbers reflected in Figure 1 are the arbitrary case numbers assigned to firms.

*Figure 1.* Factor map using multiple correspondence analysis of seven variables used to classify firms into three types
With MCA, it was possible to add more variables to see how this data set clustered instead of pre-determining a number of clusters. Instead of limiting the analysis, the following variables were input into R for a MCA:

- Student involvement
- How students are paid
- Types of positions students hold
- Firms’ years in operation
- Primary type of client firm serves
- Number of clients firms handle each semester
- How firm is primarily funded
- Student selection process
- Average number of hours students work each week
- Percentage of adviser work week devoted to student-run firm
- Degree in which students share in decision making
- Written policy manual vs. no policy manual
- Primary workspace for the firm

Given the additional variables, four clusters appeared in the MCA output. As Figure 2 shows, in the hierarchical clustering, one cluster was larger than the others. Moving from left to right, the clusters had 24, 12, 7 and 8 firms.
Figure 2. Hierarchical clustering map from multiple correspondence analysis using 13 variables to group firms

The factor map, Figure 3, shows the firms plotted into clusters using variables mentioned above. The numbers represent the arbitrary case numbers for specific firms.
Figure 3. Factor map showing clusters of firms using MCA run in R with the following variables: student involvement, how students are paid, types of positions students hold, firms' years in operation, primary type of client firm serves, number of clients firms handle each semester, how firm is primarily funded, student selection process, average number of hours students work each week, percentage of adviser work week devoted to student-run firm, degree in which students share in decision making, written policy manual vs. no policy manual, and primary workspace for the firm. On dimension 2, 8.31 percent of the variance is explained; 9.41 percent of the variance is explained for dimension 1.
Cluster 1 characteristics, from the MCA, are a high level of student involvement, students are involved in the decision making process all of the time, the firm does not have a designated space, it has 4-7 clients and advisers spent a low percentage of their workweek devoted to the firm. Cluster 2 characteristics included medium student involvement and firms have been operating between five and nine years. They are primarily funded by PRSSA or student dues. Cluster 3 characteristics were a significant number of clients (8-11 and 12 or more), dedicated office space, advisers who spend more than 50 percent of their workweek devoted to the firm, primary clients of area businesses, students paid in credit hours and students working an average of 15-19 hours per week. Cluster 4 represented firms that served a mixed client base, compensated students with access to a cooperative account for professional development or a combination of wage, credit and stipends. Cluster 4 firms were funded by a combination of university funds and client fees. Discussion about limitations and concerns about this clustering schema will follow in Chapter 5. Open-ended questions from the adviser questionnaire provide more detail to the snapshot of the student-run firms.

Themes from Advisers

Open-ended questions from the adviser survey presented themes about observed transformations in students working at the firms, value to students and their post-graduation job attainment. This section aims to use adviser themes to provide thoughts to the following research questions: What benefits of agency work experience for the undergraduate public relations majors do the advisers of student-run public
Advisers were asked, what observed transformations do you see in students working at the student-run firm from their first day working at the firm to their leaving the firm? The observations fell into two overarching themes: student growth and realizations about the profession. One respondent captured the transformations like this: “They gain confidence because they see how much experience they have gained. They gain confidence in their ability to think independently and to take on new challenges and manage ambiguities and unknowns.”

Student growth was conveyed with comments about increased student confidence and maturation. One respondent said this confidence enabled students to sell with conviction to their clients; another said students have a greater sense of personal responsibility when they leave the agency. Increased confidence as public relations practitioners was mentioned. Diplomacy, time management, desire to produce quality work, accountability to peers and self were also cited as transformations. “Their attitude changes from doing something for a grade as an abstract situation to very specific real world urgency,” according to a respondent, who said personal and professional maturity increases. As student confidence grows, an adviser reports, the students tackle more creative and complex projects.

Leadership was an area repeated in the adviser comments. “They (students) are also seen as leaders by their peers and take on the responsibility as leaders,” according to one respondent. Another phrased the student transformation as moving from just a
“passive member to really taking responsibility and advancing a project beyond expectations.”

A deeper understanding of public relations was repeatedly cited. Descriptions touched on public relations tasks and a couple of respondents talked about the “big picture” perspective. One respondent cited students gain more realistic expectations of public relations agency work. Understanding of agency work was cited by other respondents as well. One reported that students call it “eye-opening.” Some respondents cited specific agency tasks like timekeeping and billing. Another respondent phrased it so, “Many develop a new awareness of the challenges. Students grow incredibly during this experience.”

Client interactions and student learning from these experiences were strong themes in the responses. One respondent said the most significant observed transformation was student views of clients. Students realize the “client is king.” Another respondent phrased an observation like this, “The fact that our clients are paying money makes most of them have a level of stress to deliver over and above product.” Through their experiences, students showed a greater desire to solicit clients, according to a respondent. Students have a more focused understanding of satisfying clients’ needs, anticipating client issues and managing clients. Students learn how to “deal with something that doesn't follow a textbook--i.e. clients who change their minds,” said one respondent.

Improved writing, understanding of media relations, awareness of environment scanning and research, and working with deadlines were specific skills mentioned.
Problem-solving and teambuilding showed up in adviser responses. Increased participation in PRSSA was cited by one respondent. While not a major theme in the bulk of responses, the adviser said students became enthusiastic and involved in the organization after firm experience.

“Realization” and “realistic” were frequently used words in the responses. One respondent said students realize the challenges of serving clients at a high level. Another said students become more aware of industry opportunities and are more career focused. A pithy response was that the observed transformation was “from student to professional.” Another said, “The whole experience sets them apart from students who have no practical experience.”

The survey question about what value, if any, did student workers gain from their experiences gathered similar insights as the question about observed transformations. Experience, specific skills, contacts, and resume and portfolio building were consistent themes. Complementing coursework and applying what they’ve learned in the classroom were more prominent in responses to this question. Leadership and client interactions from the previous question were echoed in responses to this question as well.

Career implications were more frequently cited by advisers for this question. One adviser cited the value of the agency experience as noted in the following statement, “Agency graduates are highly sought after among firms we work with that need entry-level staff.” Another said students are “infinitely more marketable upon graduation.” Their portfolios are “impressive, which secures high level internships and
entry level jobs.” Another said students working at the firm “always have the best portfolios.” The same adviser also said students have the most industry contacts, are confident in their job searches and tend to be the first ones with jobs. Discussion material for interviews was a value cited by some advisers. Directors learned how to plan and manage meetings, provide constructive feedback, evaluate work performance, and manage associates, according to a respondent. “Better prepared for their careers” was how one adviser phrased the value. Learning public relations was not the field for them was another cited value for the students.

The #1 value is “working with others,” said one adviser. Many advisers touched on interpersonal and team skills. One adviser provided this list of values: “Portfolio development, hands-on experience, self-management, team building, client service, client management, budgeting, campaign planning, timelines, and various skills including: press release writing Web publishing graphics social media creation and management layout and design.”

Imperfection was a lesser theme in the questions about values and observed transformation. Advisers said students learn about messy projects, clients who don’t give project teams enough feedback and how things do not always run smoothly. Business acumen was another lightly mentioned concept, specific to the public relations industry.

Advisers were asked to describe in their observations how the student experience at the student-run public relations firm assists or hinders post-graduation job attainment? The bulk of respondents said firm experiences helped students with job
attainment. Adviser responses included both securing internships and post-graduation positions in public relations. Advisers used words like “tremendously,” “always,” “no question,” “of course” and a “major plus” to describe how firm experiences helped students attain jobs.

Themes emerged about the quality of jobs and internships, and how quickly the students were able to secure them. One respondent said students who worked for the firm were selected for the local industry’s top pick of internships. “The practical experience has allowed them to gain a job much quicker,” according to another.

The agency experience helps students secure more senior positions, said one adviser. “Firms often count their experience as, well, experience. Our students often get jobs that call for experience when they don't have anything other than this practicum and internships.” Another said often students obtain above entry-level positions upon graduation.

Some advisers mentioned the products of the agency work that help student attain positions. One mentioned improved contacts and a real-life client’s testimonial. The students are better prepared to address interview questions about hands-on applications of coursework. “Employers are often impressed.” Another said agency students learn the “language” of agencies and are more prepared for the demands, which helps them in the interview process. The agency experience communicates to prospective employers that students are serious about their field of interest, said one respondent. An adviser noted that “I am more inclined to write a strong recommendation
for those whom I know work hard in our student firm, regardless of how well they do in my classes.”

One adviser reported the “majority of students participating in the firm have obtained jobs post-graduation, which they credit to involvement in the firm.” The same adviser said nearly every student who had been ACTIVE (sic) has landed at least one internship as a result of working with the firm. Another adviser recounted a student who reported student-run firm experience as the most important reason she was offered her job. Another told of two students who attained a job and internship, respectively, because of their agency work with nonprofits. The experiences “open doors” and make students more marketable. One adviser relayed a belief from a local PR firm executive about the experience giving new graduates at least one to two years of professional experience ahead of their peers who only do internships.

Agency reputation was a lesser theme represented in responses. Advisers commented on how local public relations communities embrace the students from the firms. One school’s alumni actively recruit agency graduates. “Employers sing the praises of our firm and what it has prepared the students to do before they leave school,” touted one adviser.

Very few mentions of hindrance were made. When one adviser couldn’t say definitively that the agency experience helped, he/she qualified that “at this point, all I can say is that it definitely does not hinder our students.” One adviser reported most of the students decided they did not want to work at a public relations firm.
Experience in a student-run agency is not enough by itself, according to one adviser who said, “Students need to have other internships. There's a huge difference between leading a team and working and learning on a team.” The adviser continued that connections made at the student-run agency often help students find internships.

Some advisers qualified responses based on student motivation and initiative. One said, “Those who worked hardest, did the most, always had jobs upon graduation. However, that was only a small number. Most students just sit back and wait to be told what to do.” Another echoed this sentiment by saying “good students” who work for the firm understand how to leverage that experience and those with “poor work habits are still jobless after the experience.”

Responses to open-ended questions were emphatic with advisers using capital letters, superlatives and exclamation points. A few advisers responded that their firms were too new to be able to make this observation. Not all respondents touted the helpfulness of the firms. “Not much” and “has not” were a couple of the lukewarm responses. Others reported that there was no effect or said they did not know.

Results from Graduate Survey

The administration of the student version of the survey was a disappointment. Results are given here to illustrate the six public relations graduates who responded. Five of the six worked at student-run public relations firms. The one who did not work at a student-run firm explained the university did not have a firm in the 1980s when she was in college. The respondents represent three universities. Their primary majors (communication studies, journalism, advertising/public relations) varied, but all said
public relations/strategic communication was their primary concentration. All of the six finished undergraduate degrees in four years and the average GPA was 3.67. GPAs ranged from 3.360 and 3.992.

Of the five working at student-run firms, two reported spending 20 plus hours a week working at the firm. Two other said they spent 7-14 hours a week and one said 0-6 hours a week. Three of the students spent four semesters employed at the firm, one said five semesters and another said three semesters. Only one of the students was paid and that was via stipend. The majority handled nonprofit clients; one helped campus departments and organizations with public relations. Only one of the students sought a public relations position following graduation. The other pursued advanced studies.

Themes from Graduates

In the student instrument, six open-ended questions gathered feedback about firm experience and career developments. While themes will be hard to see in only five graduate responses, a synthesis of their comments is worth mentioning here. Graduates were simply asked what they liked and disliked about the firm experience. These comments echoed what advisers reported. The graduates liked the hands-on experience the firm provided. Applying classroom concepts to real world clients was noted. How to interact with clients and present info to them was mentioned, as was the “real feedback and reactions” clients offer. One graduate said she liked working as a team and learning about public relations.
One student said it gave him a chance to figure out what he wanted to do with his life. Another graduate said: “I loved that I could finally apply everything I was learning in the classroom to actual clients. I was able to hone my leadership, writing, and logistical skills, and gain real-world experience while doing something productive for a nonprofit or community organization that otherwise would have no public relations assistance.”

The dislikes of the graduates was something not covered as much in adviser responses. A lack of direction and momentum was one dislike. Working with other students who quit or failed to deliver was another challenge. According to one student, “It was a challenge to my leadership abilities to corral all of the other students participating, and motivate them to do their part.” Another said soliciting new clients was frustrating and a lack of “backing from other departments” was an issue. The amount of hours spent working on top of other college responsibilities, non-communicating clients and a lack of work to spread among a large team were dislikes for one graduate.

Graduates were asked to report what they learned while working at the student-run firm. Working with clients, multitasking, thinking strategically, and professionalism were mentioned. Reported career insights centered on skills and traits. One graduate talked about learning to give clients her best advice, but ultimately moving in the direction the client wants. Another said he learned diplomacy was one of the most vital skills in public relations. Team and account management was key for another respondent.

Graduates were asked if the student-run firm experience affected their grade point average. One said, “I do think that it is possible my real-world experiences in the
field made my public relations classes easier for me, and therefore a source of higher grades.” Two said no effect and one said it was a positive correlation. A graduate, who reported no effect, said the experience “made me a little more stressed out.”

How did student-run experiences affect a graduate’s ability to secure full-time employment in public relations? One said the experience provided “valuable insights” and another said potential employers saw resume lines about some agency experience and leadership roles while in college. One said the effect was significant: “I think my experiences had a very significant impact on my ability to secure both an internship and a full-time position in public relations. In my internship interview, most of the questions were inquiries about my various experiences in the student-run agency.” On the other hand, a respondent wouldn’t report a correlation, but said the experience “definitely added to my skills making me a great candidate for this position.” Another graduate respondent suggested the job market should be considered because a job search is affected by the job market. In her instance, she reported looking for a public relations position in a tough economic climate.

This study provided qualitative and quantitative looks at student-run public relations firms in higher education institutions in the U.S. The results were reported as themes from advisers and graduates, a description of firms and their institutions, and a quantitative analysis of typologies to classify firms. Results will be synthesized and conclusions and recommendations outlined in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated student-run public relations firms at institutions of higher education in the U.S. The originally conceived framework was designed to gather data on the firms and then public relations graduates who worked at the firms and their non-firm counterparts. While the student part of the study did not materialize as hoped, the adviser information about 55 of the 119 U.S. firms gives background on firms and adds to the body of knowledge. Results from a survey instrument e-mailed to advisers provide a better picture of student-run firms.

An analysis of about half of the student-run firms on college campuses in the U.S. was the overall result. Firms may advertise themselves as one-of-a-kind phenomena, but they are more alike than dissimilar. The majority operated continuously and is primarily funded through client fees and university funds. The bulk of the firms have written policy manuals. Open access and competitive applications were the selection processes most used for student staffs. The majority of firms do not pay students, but almost all of them use a titled structure for the students. More firms serve a nonprofit client base. Students are the decision makers and the majority handle the firm’s planning, finances, client negotiation, client complaints and new client development most or all of the time. As one adviser phrased it, he or she only spent five percent of each week with firm activities because “it’s student run.”

The generalized snapshot doesn’t fit into one of Bush’s agency types. As a cohort, these firms fit between Type 1 and Type 2 with a few Type 3 tendencies. It’s
possible that firms falling into Type 3 have already dissolved or where in a hiatus period during the firm search phase of this study. The non-responding advisers could represent a completely different picture of types of firms. In Bush’s typology, Type 3 has faculty involvement at the medium and low levels. While this was not investigated, there could be a connection between those advisers who did not respond and the type of firm they represent.

The adviser instrument was not crafted to be a replication or test of Bush’s typology, but it does provide some support of the types. More of the firms fit into Type 1 and Type 2 in this study. When dividing firms into types, an independent system described in Chapter 3 and based on Bush’s journal article was used. Firms did seem to fit into three categories, as Bush reported. Type 2 did feel like a catch-all for the firms that didn’t exactly fit into Type 1 or Type 3.

When firms were grouped by type, characteristics, outside of ones used for the classification process, were largely similar. Across all types, most were in operation between 0-4 years and students spent an average of two semesters working at the firm. The average number of clients was 0-3 for most firms, with Type 1 having an equal number of firms with 4-7 clients, as it did firms with 0-3 clients. Funding was typically by client fees. The Type 3 firms were equally represented by firms with primary funding from clients, university money and no funds.

Statistical support for significant differences between types depended on the variable. Years in operation, as a variable, was not statistically significant and failed to reject the null hypothesis. Neither was student involvement. Average number of hours
students worked at the firm per week and program ACEJMC accredited were, but with modest effect sizes. Years in operation is interesting because Bush suggested Type 1 would have a low risk of dissolving and Type 3 would have a high risk. Research would need to include data from dissolved firms to provide a better analysis. This dataset reflected a crop of newer firms that could be watched in the future to provide information on variables tied to dissolution of firms. Student involvement, a construct created from how often students handled certain tasks, across the types was strong. Most advisers answered that students handled the five tasks often or always. This is encouraging, especially given these are student-run firms. It is possible differences might show up if graduate data were added to the mix. Would students report the same frequencies? Would “more successful”—job attainment, GPA, years to graduation or other variables—students come from firms with higher student involvement. This might be where the firms would differ on the student involvement metric. This construct could be expanded in future administrations of adviser and graduate instruments.

Average number of hours students worked at the firm per week and ACEJMC accreditation were statistically different between the types. Previous studies looking at accredited vs. not-accredited program only showed small differences (Benigni, Cheng & Cameron, 2004, and Masse & Popovich, 2007). This is worth further examination. While different, what effect does accreditation have on the firm and the students’ experiences? The average number of hours students work at the firm differing among the firm types makes sense. Bush (2009) reported that Type 1 firms had required work hours and Type 3 firms had no required meetings. How often students were required to meet was not collected in this study, but the finding is consistent with Bush’s study.
Even when firms were divided into four groups based on years in operation, the firms were more alike than dissimilar. More had written policy or employee manuals and most had firms where students were not paid. More of the younger firms had dedicated office space. The firms operating 15 or more years were divided between shared space and no space. Most firms had titles that included account executives, area-specific titles and titles of a hierarchical nature. More firms were open access without an application process. Community nonprofits were the primary clients for firms of all ages, but area businesses were more frequently the primary client for the firms 15 years or older. This provides little insight into why some firms survive longer than others or best practices that could be gleaned.

Do student-run firms group into three types as proposed by Bush (2009)? Statistical efforts to support the three types provided mixed results. Two-step clustering through PASW®, when instructed to place firms into three groups, was able to do so. When the number of clusters was not specified, one cluster was suggested. The way cluster analysis views data by distances and not relationship or correlation was possibly an issue, so multiple correspondence analysis was employed. Multiple correspondence analysis suggested the data divided firms into four clusters. It’s important to note that Cluster 1 was much larger than the other clusters. The characteristics from the cluster do not perfectly align with Bush’s typology, but provide another way to view firms. That being said, Cluster 3 resembled Bush’s Type 1, Cluster 2 was like her Type 3 and Cluster 1 her Type 2. Cluster 4 seemed to reflect responses that were a combination of responses or responses coded from the “other” option on the questionnaire. This cluster could point to problems with the first administration of this survey instrument. A survey
instrument with more options for forced responses might eliminate this cluster. Or there may be four types of firms.

Some of the characteristics of firms in this study fit into PRSSA’s standards for its nationally affiliated (PRSSA, 2010) status for student-run firms. A documented mission statement and written structure are in line with the majority of firms having a written policy manual. Titles in the firm structure align with this study. The affiliation requires the firms serves at least three clients with at least three students assigned to each client. This study did not ask advisers how many students handled each account, but the number of clients reported by most advisers is in line with the structure requirements of PRSSA. These are just a few of the qualities PRSSA requires of its nationally affiliated firms. Other requirements are tailored to connecting students with PRSA (professionals’ version of PRSSA). These were not captured in this study, but could be in future study.

The grouping of firms for the sake of grouping them is meaningless. But classifying the firms in an effort to better study them and determine how students benefit from them provides a service to public relations educators. It could also help administrators place energies in more effective places. For example, the firms that have been in existence the longest have done so without dedicated office space. Using firm classifications to label how experiential an agency is can provide information for a program and its students. Gibbons and Hopkins (1980) said “The degree of experience is based on the extent of direct contact with objects, forms, features and processes; the extent that students are involved in the planning and execution of an activity; the extent that the participants are responsible for mastering an activity; and the extent that participants have an opportunity to experience personal growth.”
Adviser insights about student transformations while working at the firm, value of student experiences at firms and how the experiences assist or hinder post-graduation were mostly positive reflections. What benefits of agency work experience for the undergraduate students do the advisers of student-run public relations agency report? Student growth and realizations about public relations echoed throughout the responses. Student growth was noted by increases in maturation, confidence, responsibility, problem-solving, leadership skills and teamwork.

What observations do the advisers of student-run public relations agencies report on student learning? Realizations about public relations captured everything from awareness about the industry, advancing tactical skills and tasks, understanding public relations as a business, and handling client interactions. The value of the firm experience was reported as added experience and a complement to coursework. Resume and portfolio building were other values mentioned.

What observations do the advisers of student-run public relations agencies report on career development? Most advisers described firm experience as helpful for post-graduation job attainment. Quality and quickness were two prominent themes. Firm graduates secured positions more quickly, according to the advisers. And the positions were sometimes a step above entry-level. The products of agency work, like portfolio pieces and client testimonies, were helpful during student job searches.

Adviser responses were mostly positive. Bias may exist for advisers highly connected with their student-run firm. They may be in the habit of defending and promoting their firms so they continue to operate in periods of competitive budgets.
Responses also relied on adviser recollection. Some may be more able to remember the extremes, highly successful and very unsuccessful students. A few advisers said they couldn’t say definitively how the firm helped students in their acquisition of a position. Some seemed reluctant to make assertions about their graduates without data to back them up.

The adviser comments about student experiences closely mimicked outcomes seniors reported about out-of-class experiences in a 1993 Kuh study. Confidence, practical competences, knowledge acquisition, application of knowledge, and vocational competence were a few that were represented in adviser comments in this study. Student-run firms characteristics and data collected from graduates in the future could be aligned with other experiential learning outcomes in order to build theory.

Broad generalizations must be limited because half of the firms are not represented in this study. Bush’s study looked at 10 firms and this study expanded the picture to 55 firms, but more research is needed for a clearer understanding. Forty-six percent of firms were represented in this study.

No conclusions can be drawn from the administration of the graduate version of the survey. Accessing the public relations graduates was an immense hurdle. An annual survey of public relations graduates would be a better way to capture data about these graduates and their activities (PRSSA, internships, student-run firm agency). Having a survey aligned with PRSSA or AEJMC would lend more credibility to the exercise and may ensure more participation from advisers. Collecting data each year would create opportunities for trend studies. An annual survey would be one that organizations come
to expect to fill out each year. Incentives might help participation. An annual survey distributed by participating universities to its graduating seniors as part of the graduation process could help acquire more student responses. This would also eliminate some privacy concerns universities expressed when asked to help the researcher reach their graduates. An alternative might be to encourage public relations programs have students participate in the annual survey of journalism graduates issued from Lee Becker at the University of Georgia. It asks students about their college experiences working at other media outlets. Public relations firms and advertising or integrated marketing communication agencies could be added to possible survey responses on the Becker survey.

The timing of this study may have missed the mark. The first invitation for adviser participation was toward the end of the fall semester and some advisers were already on break. The response rate improved with each invitation (extended into spring semester) and phone calls to non-responding advisers collected a few more. Also, a number of firms weren’t old enough to have graduates yet. For example, “If your study is ongoing, we would be happy to have you contact our graduates, but at this time, we only have 1 graduate since we are still new.”

A few modifications will need to be made to the survey instruments based on this first administration. While an online survey e-mail to respondents is easy, it may not collect the nuances a semi-structured telephone interview would. The one telephone interview conducted gave the researcher more insights into firm experiences than what was collected through the online survey. Even though survey instruments were evaluated by a panel and pilot tested, they could still be tweaked a bit. Two of the open-
ended questions on the adviser survey were too similar and most respondents echoed comments from the first question in the second question. Advisers were asked how students were paid, but who is paid should also be asked. On firm funding, advisers were asked to report the primary way firms were funded. Many offered “other” responses where they gave percentages. The question should ask respondents to give percentages for different funding sources.

Questions were designed to determine how much decision-making students handled. It might be interesting to compare that with how hands on the advisers are or their philosophies and approaches to the adviser role. One adviser made the following comment, “nobody is here to bail them out.”

Additional responses can be added to questions based on the “other” responses from this survey administration. “Work” seemed to be the wrong word in the adviser survey because some took this to mean only for pay.

Future Study

Limitations and delimitations of this study signal a wealth of possibility for future study. Student motivation was not considered in this study and could offer insights between those who seek experiential learning and those who do not. Students who pursue positions at firms are in effect self-selecting. One adviser commented that students who join the firm are typically the students who have either been extremely involved already, overachievers or have realized their portfolios are weak and want to supplement academic work through the firm.
Other measures of success and learning will need to be considered in future research. GPA is a limited measure of student learning and indicator of student success. Student demographics of firms could be matched to the communication department’s demographics. Are certain students seeking firm positions? Are students with certain learning styles seeking firm experiences? Do those learning style preferences make a difference in their firm experiences?

King (2008) proposed the academy will need to teach students the “culture” of journalism and could be the starting point for studies into what students learn about the “culture” of public relations while working for the student-run firm. Is this culture transmitted more or less through these experiential learning situations than classroom activities?

The firm environment’s effect on student workers and their learning is another area of possible investigation. In a study of practicing journalists, researchers found that day-to-day interaction with editors and colleagues was the most powerful force guiding values, ethics and professional practice (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996). Advisers in this study reported that students learned about how public relations agencies worked. They learned the culture and industry language. Part of this environment includes interactions with advisers and other student workers, at various stages in their studies. The impact and effects of these interactions could provide other insights into what happens for students while working at the firm. What happens during the socialization and informal learning that occurs at the firms? What are students learning from each other on-the-job? How does the student-run firm look through the framework of collaborative and cooperative learning models?
Kuh (2005) looked at student success in DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice) institutions. These were institutions that performed well in student engagement and graduation rates on items from the National Survey of Student Engagement. Analyzing these specific institutions or creating a similar scheme for institutions with student-run firms might be research options.

Further investigations into student learning that happens, or doesn’t happen, could use pre and post tests of student knowledge of public relations and tactical skills. Looking for indicators of accelerated learning might bolster support for firms. Is there a tipping point for student learning at firm? How much more do they learn with three semesters of experience compared to just one or two? One research question asked what benefits of agency work experience for the undergraduate public relations majors do the advisers of student-run public relations agency report? Advisers reported benefits and a next step could be to devise a way to conduct a cost-benefit analysis that might give advisers a way to quantify benefits of firm experience.

Comparing student outcomes from internship experience and student-run agency experience is another area to explore. One professor, not included in this study, said his university abandoned its agency for internships in a strategic move. He said there were more internships in the city than public relations majors, so the professors felt it was best for students to work “out in the professional world to gain their experience” (personal communication). In the study, one adviser reported how an area public relations practitioner believed student-run agency experience is like a couple of years of work experience.
Looking at the timing of students’ experience at the student-run public relations firm could be collected. When a student worked at the firm during his or her collegiate career might have varying effects on learning. Placing the firm experience into students’ continuum of learning while in college might illustrate when it provides the most impact.

Is a 10-hour a week student-agency position as intensive as a 40-hour a week summer internship? An adviser posed this question in the questionnaire. The adviser said students learn “professionalism--but not sure it's any more different than those doing traditional internships instead.” Would mimicking some of the agency tasks in a classroom setting be as effective or is the complete agency experience necessary?

A handful of the firms are in the beginning stages of development. Checking back in with them in a year or two to see which one survived might give clues to success factors for firms. Fifteen firms in this study were established in 2008-09. This would give an interesting cohort to watch. From research, best practices could be bolstered. For the antithesis, research could probe into the dissolved firms for common themes or warning signs of future trouble. The firm used in this study’s pilot was classified as a Type 1 firm. It is defunct. According to Bush’s schema this type has the lowest chances of dissolving. A case study on what caused the demise of a student agency could provide valuable insights.

One university in the study has all students work in a student-run firm set-up. While it would not have the non-firm students for comparison, it would make an interesting case study. Another firm prime for a case study is one where a team of five
faculty and staff members divide adviser duties. Replicating Bush’s typology with a larger sample and truly challenging the typology is another possibility for future study.

Adviser remarks were mostly positive about the student experiences. Other perspectives could be compared to control for potential bias. Future study could see what employers say about the graduates hired from the firms. Client feedback could also be mined for themes.

An international survey could illuminate how other countries are using or not using student-run public relations firms. While this study will look at students in American universities, a quick glimpse at journalism education across the globe shows diversity in instruction. Great Britain and Austria maintain an on-the-job training tradition (Fröhlic and Holtz-Bacha, 2003).

Adviser comments hinted at other potential studies. One adviser talked about how students persuaded her to let them take on extremely challenging clients. Clients run the gamut. This study simply asked if clients were nonprofits, area businesses, national clients, etc. It did not measure the complexity of the campaign or how challenging a client was. Creating some kind of metric for client or campaign complexity might provide clues to student learning. In problem-based learning, problems should get more complex as students progress through curriculum (Vermunt, 2003).

Firm reputation would be another metric for evaluation. A few advisers commented on how their firm reputation helped graduates obtain post-graduate positions in the area. A couple of advisers mentioned how students working at the firms
then became more involved in PRSSA. One could investigate correlations between agency work and subsequent professional association participation.

Recommendations

It is important to study the mechanisms used to help students. As one adviser said, it is “nice to see research being done on such an important aspect of PRSSA.” Student-run public relations firms are a way to give students a taste of a prospective career and its nuances while re-enforcing concepts in the classroom. In an environment demanding more accountability, advisers and programs will need to be able to provide some proof of student learning and development. First, keeping a current list of universities with student-run firms, while a moving target, would allow researchers to investigate aspects of the firms. An annual survey would be one way to gather data consistently for a database that could provide opportunities for trend study. Best cases could be tracked and shared in the literature. Advisers and public relations program directors can compare their firms with firms in this study. Programs thinking about launching firms can see what others are doing and decide what makes sense for them. The most crucial recommendation is for researchers to find ways to study the students working at the firms and the learning that is happening, or not, at the firms.

In conclusion, this study provided a multi-method analysis of student-run public relations agencies of varying years in operation. It provided some quantitative data and more qualitative insight to add to the body of research.
APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENTS
Survey of public relations graduates
(was entered into online survey system www.surveymonkey.com)
Consent notice was located on screen prior to this one requiring a click of the mouse

1. What was your primary major for your undergraduate degree?
   o Advertising
   o Advertising/public relations
   o Communication studies
   o Integrated marketing communication
   o Journalism/mass communications
   o Public relations/strategic communication
   o Other (please specify) ________________

2. Which communication area was your primary concentration for your undergraduate degree?
   o Advertising
   o Communication studies
   o Integrated marketing communication
   o Journalism/mass communications
   o Public relations/strategic communication
   o Other (please specify) ________________

3. What was the first semester you enrolled in college?
   o Spring
   o Summer
   o Fall

   Year _____

4. How many times did you change your declared major?
   o Did not change it once it was declared
   o 1
   o 2
   o 3 or more

5. How many years were you enrolled in college before graduating with an undergraduate degree?
   o 3 years
   o 3.5 years
   o 4 years
   o 4.5 years
   o 5 years
   o 5.5 years
   o 6 years
   o Other (please specify)_________
6. When did you graduate with your undergraduate degree?
   o Spring
   o Summer
   o Fall
   Year _____

7. What was your overall grade point average (GPA) upon graduation from your undergraduate institution? (If your school did not use a 4.0 scale, please select other and explain.)
   o _______
   o Other

8. While an undergraduate student, did you work for the student-run public relations firm? If no, skip to Question 21.
   o Yes
   o No

9. How many hours per week on average did you spend working at the student-run public relations firm?
   o 0-6 hours per week
   o 7-14 hours per week
   o 15-19 hours per week
   o 20 or more hours per week

10. How many semesters/quarters did you work at the student-run public relations firm? _____ (enter the number of semesters/quarters)

11. Was your university on a semester or quarter system?
   o Semester
   o Quarter

12. How were you paid for your work at the student-run public relations firm?
   o Paid an hourly wage
   o Paid in credit hours
   o Stipend
   o Not paid
   o Combination of wage, credit and/or stipend
   o Other ____________________

13. What positions or titles did you occupy at the student-run public relations firm? Mark all that apply.
   o Account coordinators
   o Account executives
   o Area-specific titles like creative director/Web designer/media relations
   o Assistant account executives
14. What was the primary type of client your firm served?
   - Campus departments or organizations
   - Community nonprofits
   - Area businesses
   - National or international clients
   - Prepared or pre-packaged client for competitions like PRSSA Bateman
   - Other ____________

15. What did you like about your experiences at the student-run public relations firm?

16. What did you dislike about your experiences working at the student-run public relations firm?

17. What did you learn while working at the student-run public relations firm?

18. What career insights did you gain while working at the student-run public relations firm?

19. How do you think your student-run agency experiences affected your grade point average (GPA)?

20. How do you think your student-run agency experiences affected your ability to secure full-time employment in public relations?

21. Did you work for other campus media outlets while an undergraduate student?
   - Yes
   - No

22. How many semesters/quarters did you work for other campus media outlets? Enter the number of semesters/quarters for each one. Mark 0 for no semesters worked.
   - College magazine
   - College newspaper
   - College radio station
   - College television station
   - College yearbook
   - College Web site
   - Other (Please explain: ______________________)
   - I did not work for other campus media outlets.
23. How many public relations-related internships (paid or unpaid) did you have during your undergraduate experience, excluding work for the student-run public relations firm or projects considered coursework?
   - 0
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - More than 4

24. How many nonpublic relations-related internships (paid or unpaid) did you have during your undergraduate experience?
   - 0
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - More than 4

25. While an undergraduate student, how many hours each week were spent working somewhere other than at the student-run public relations agency or internships?
   - 0-6 hours per week
   - 7-14 hours per week
   - 15-19 hours per week
   - 20 or more hours per week

26. After graduation from your undergraduate program, what plan did you actively pursue?
   - Full-time employment in public relations field
   - Part-time employment in public relations field
   - Full-time employment in a different field
   - Part-time employment in a different field
   - Graduate school, law school or medical school
   - Military service
   - Peace Corps, Teach for America or other civil service
   - Other (Please specify _________________________)

27. If you sought employment in public relations, how many months passed after graduation before you secured a full-time position in public relations?
   - 0-3 months
   - 4-6 months
   - 7-10 months
   - 11-12 months
   - More than 12 months
   - Was not seeking employment in public relations after graduation
28. Are you currently employed in a full-time public relations position?
   o Yes
   o No

Mark the appropriate response.

I am
   ___ Male        ___ Female

What is your racial or ethnic identification? Mark only one.
   o American Indian or other Native American
   o Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander
   o Black or African American
   o White (non-Hispanic)
   o Mexican or Mexican American
   o Puerto Rican
   o Other Hispanic or Latino/a
   o Multiracial
   o Other

In what year were you born?

   ____ (year)

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for completing this survey. Your input is greatly valued.
Survey of Student-Run Public Relations Firm Advisers
(was entered into online survey system www.surveymonkey.com)
Consent notice was located on screen prior to this one requiring a click of the mouse

1. Has your university had a student-run public relations firm for any time in the past 10 years?
   o Yes
   o No

2. In what year was the firm established?
   _____ (enter year)

3. How many years has/did the firm operate?
   _____ years

4. Has there ever been a period since the firm’s establishment when the firm did not operate?
   o Yes
   o No
   o Explain _______________________

5. How is the student-run public relations firm primarily funded?
   o University funds
   o Grant/foundation
   o Client fees
   o Private donations
   o Other (please specify) ___________________

6. On average, how many students are employed at the student-run firm each semester/quarter?
   _____ (enter number of students per semester/quarter)

7. Is your university on a semester or quarter system?
   o Semester
   o Quarter

8. How many hours per week does the average student spend working for the student-run public relations firm?
   o 0-6 hours per week
   o 7-14 hours per week
   o 15-19 hours per week
   o 20 or more hours per week

9. How many semesters/quarters does the average student work at the student-run public relations firm?
   _____ (enter the number of semesters/quarters)
10. What is the primary workspace for the student-run public relations firm?
   o Dedicated office space
   o Shared space with other student organizations
   o No space
   o Other (Explain: ________________________)

11. Does the student-run firm have a written policy or employee manual?
   o Yes
   o No

12. How are students paid for work at the student-run public relations firm?
   o Paid an hourly wage
   o Paid in credit hours
   o Stipend
   o Not paid
   o Combination of wage, credit and/or stipend
   o Other ________________

13. Do students have titles when working for the firm?
   o Yes
   o No

14. If yes, what positions or titles can students occupy at the student-run public relations firm? Mark all that apply.
   o Account coordinators
   o Account executives
   o Area-specific titles like creative director/Web designer/media relations
   o Assistant account executives
   o Executive director/director
   o Intern
   o Secretary
   o Treasurer
   o Other ______________

15. On average, how many clients does the firm handle each semester/quarter?
   _______ (Enter number of clients)

16. How are students selected to work for the student-run firm?
   o Open access (All students who want to participate can.)
   o Competitive application/audition/interview process
   o Non-competitive application/audition/interview process
   o Handpicked and invited by faculty
   o Other process ______________________________
17. What is the primary type of client your firm serves?
   o Campus departments or organizations
   o Community nonprofits
   o Area businesses
   o National or international clients
   o Prepared or prepackaged client for competitions like the PRSSA Bateman
   o Other ____________

18. To what degree do students share in the decision-making processes at the firm?
   o All
   o Some
   o Little
   o None

19. The students who work for the student-run public relations firm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are involved in the firm’s planning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are involved in the financial aspect of the firm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiate with clients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handle client complaints</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicit new clients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. What observed transformations do you see in the students working at the student-run firm from their first day working at the firm to their leaving the firm?

21. What value, if any, did the student workers gain through their experiences at the student-run firm?

22. In your observation, how did the student experience at the student-run public relations firm assist or hinder post-graduation job attainment?

23. On average, what percentage of YOUR week is devoted to the student-run public relations firm? (Please give a percentage.)
24. Describe your employment at the university.
   o Part-time
   o Full-time

25. What is your position at the university?
   o Adjunct
   o Staff
   o Assistant professor
   o Associate professor
   o Full professor
   o Professional in residence
   o Other (please specify)

26. Does your program or university have e-mail contacts for graduates of your program?
   o Yes
   o No

27. Would you be willing to help researchers connect with your public relations graduates via anonymous questionnaire to answer research questions looking at differences between the students who worked for the student-run public relations firm and those who did not?
   o Yes
   o No

28. The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study. Contact information collected will only be used to contact advisers interested in having their graduates participate in the larger study.
   Your name ______________________________
   Institution ______________________________
   E-mail _________________________________
   Phone _________________________________

29. Is there anything else you would like to add?

-------

Thank you for completing this survey. Your input is greatly valued.
APPENDIX B

INSTRUMENT PANELISTS AND FEEDBACK MEMO
The following experts were consulted on the questionnaires used in this study. They were selected because of their expertise in public relations, student-run programs or statistics and survey design. The panelists are a mix of educators and practitioners.

Dr. Pu-shih “Daniel” Chen

Dr. Chen is an assistant professor in the higher education program at University of North Texas. Prior to his position at UNT, Dr. Chen worked for the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) at Indiana University at Bloomington. He was also an instructor at Florida State University’s Career Center.

Dr. Douglas Ann Newsom

Dr. Newsom is a recently retired professor from the Schieffer School of Journalism at Texas Christian University. She is an accredited public relations professional (APR from Public Relations Society of America) and co-author of three widely used public relations textbooks. She serves as a member of the Council of the International Public Relations Association and has been involved with public relations organizations at all levels. She has chaired the accrediting committee that reports to the Accrediting Council on Education for Journalism and Mass Communication.

Celia McCall Wilson

Ms. Wilson works at the University of North Texas Center for Interdisciplinary Research and Analysis. She is a research assistant who consults with students on their research design. She is a doctoral student in the education research area.
Jeff Wilson

Mr. Wilson is an accredited public relations (APR from Public Relations Society of America) professional at CRT/tanaka in Richmond, Virginia. He is associate vice president and director of business development. He holds a master’s degree in communications from the Grady College at the University of Georgia. He is an award-winning practitioner who managed the firm’s internship program.

Mike Wood

Mr. Wood, a professional-in-residence, teaches in the strategic communication division of the Schieffer School of Journalism at Texas Christian University. He has advised advertising campaign teams that typically place in the top nationally. He holds a master’s degree from TCU and his professional experience counts more than 25 years of national and international integrated marketing communication. He has won more than 40 American Advertising Federation Addy Awards.
Memo Re: Changes to survey instruments based on panelists’ feedback

Based on panelist feedback, minor modifications were made to the survey instruments. Comments fell into a couple of categories: those about question clarity, question branching, survey format and content suggestions.

Comments on question clarity were evaluated and made on a case-by-case basis. The researcher broke questions that could be made into two questions and used branching to prevent a respondent from having to answer questions that did not apply to them.

The question asking about a student’s age was changed to ask in what year were they born. One question asking the respondent to rank the “professionalism” of the firm on a scale from 1 to 10 was deleted and more specific questions were asked about how often students negotiated with clients, handled complaints, etc. The answers of those questions will be used to devise the type of firm, instead of having the respondents rank the firm’s professionalism.

A question was added to account for the number of times the undergraduate changed declared majors. One panelist said he sees lots of major changes, which would affect how long it took a student to graduate. Wording was changed on one question to account for the possibility of double majors.

Small editing suggestions were made. Overall, panelists agreed the questionnaire would gather the data it was designed to collect.
APPENDIX C

LIST OF SCHOOLS WITH STUDENT-RUN PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS
1. Abilene Christian University
2. Anderson University
3. Appalachian State University
4. Augustana College
5. Ball State University
6. Belmont University
7. Bloomsburg University
8. Boston University
9. Bowling Green State University
10. Brigham Young University
11. Buffalo State College
12. California State University, Chico
13. California State Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo
14. California State University, Dominguez Hills
15. California State University, Fresno
16. California University of Pennsylvania
17. Capital University
18. Central Michigan University
19. Central Washington University
20. Colorado State University
21. Drexel University
22. Eastern Illinois University
23. Eastern Michigan University
24. Elon University
25. Emerson College
26. Ferris State University
27. Flagler College
28. Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University
29. Franklin College
30. George Mason University
31. Georgia Southern University
32. Georgia State University
33. Gonzaga University
34. Grand Valley State University
35. Howard University
36. Illinois State University
37. Indiana State University
38. Indiana University
39. Indiana University of Pennsylvania
40. Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis
41. Iona College
42. Kent State
43. Louisiana State University - Baton Rouge
44. Marshall University
45. Messiah College
46. Miami University of Ohio
47. Michigan State University
48. Middle Tennessee State University
49. Murray State University
50. North Carolina State University
51. Northern Illinois University
52. Northern Kentucky University
53. Northern Michigan University
54. Northwest Missouri State University
55. Ohio Northern University
56. Ohio State University
57. Ohio University
58. Oklahoma State University
59. Otterbein College
60. Pennsylvania State University
61. Pepperdine University
62. Purdue University
63. Quinnipiac University
64. Radford University
65. Rowan University
66. Rutgers University
67. Saint John Fisher College
68. Salisbury University
69. San Jose State
70. Seton Hall University
71. Slippery Rock University
72. Southeast Missouri State University
73. Southern Illinois University, Carbondale
74. Southern Utah University
75. St. Cloud State University
76. Susquehanna University
77. Syracuse University
78. Temple University
79. Texas State University
80. Texas Tech University
81. University of Alabama at Birmingham
82. University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa
83. University of Arkansas, Fayetteville
84. University of Central Missouri
85. University of Florida
86. University of Georgia
87. University of Indianapolis
88. University of Iowa
89. University of Kansas
90. University of Maryland
91. University of Miami
92. University of Minnesota
93. University of Missouri
94. University of Nebraska, Omaha
95. University of New Mexico
96. University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
97. University of Northern Iowa
98. University of Oklahoma
99. University of Oregon
100. University of South Carolina
101. University of South Dakota
102. University of Southern California - Annenberg
103. University of Southern Indiana
104. University of Southern Mississippi
105. University of St. Thomas
106. University of Texas at Austin
107. University of Texas at San Antonio
108. University of Washington, Eau Claire
109. University of Wisconsin, Whitewater
110. Utica College
111. Valdosta State University
112. Valparaiso University
113. Virginia Polytechnic Institute
114. Wartburg College
115. West Virginia State University
116. Western Carolina University
117. Western Kentucky University
118. Wilkes University
119. York College of Pennsylvania

The Fashion Institute of Technology also has a firm, but it was not included in this study.
APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DOCUMENTATION
December 4, 2009

Sarah Maben
Department of Counseling and Higher Education
University of North Texas

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB)
RE: Human Subject Application #09307

Dear Ms. Maben:

The UNT IRB has received your request to modify your study now titled “Implications of Undergraduate Student Work Experience at Campus Public Relations Firms on GPA and Employment within Major Field.” The request to modify the research questions, to add open-ended questions to the survey instruments, and to increase participation time from 10 to 15 minutes in this study is hereby approved for the use of human subjects.

Approval for this project is October 9, 2009 to October 8, 2010.

Enclosed is the consent document with stamped IRB approval. Please copy and use this form only for your study subjects.

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. Please mark your calendar accordingly. The IRB must also review this project prior to any other modifications made. Federal policy 21 CFR 56.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only.

Please contact Shelia Bourns, Research Compliance Analyst, at (940) 565-3940, or Boyd Herndon, Director of Research Compliance, at (940) 565-3941, if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Patricia L. Kaminski, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Chair, Institutional Review Board

PK/sb
OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
August 11, 2009

Sarah Maben
Department of Counseling and Higher Education
University of North Texas

Re: Human Subjects Application No. 09307

Dear Ms. Maben:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled "Effects of Undergraduate Student Work Experience at Campus Public Relations Firms on GPA, Years to Graduation and Employment with Major Field." The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks. The submitted protocol is hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study. Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, August 11, 2009 to August 10, 2010.

Enclosed is the consent document with stamped IRB approval. Please copy and use this form only for your study subjects.

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. The IRB must also review this project prior to any modifications.

Please contact Shelia Bourns, Research Compliance Administrator, or Bcyd Herndon, Director of Research Compliance, at extension 3940, if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Patricia L. Kaminski, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Chair, Institutional Review Board

PK: sb

CC: Dr. Kathleen Whitson
University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Information Notice

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: Implications of undergraduate student work experience on campus public relations firms on GPA and employment within major field

Principal Investigator: Sarah Maben, a graduate student in the University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Higher Education.

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in a research study that involves public relations majors and their undergraduate experiences.

Study Procedures: You will be asked to answer questions about your undergraduate experience that will take about 15 minutes of your time.

Foreseeable Risks: No foreseeable risks are involved in this study.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you but will shed light on student work experience related to student-run public relations firms. Your participation is expected to help future public relations students.

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: Your responses to the online questionnaire will be anonymous and results will be reported as statistics for the group and not as specific individual surveys. Direct quotes from descriptive passages might be used to illustrate a theme in the research findings, but this would be done so anonymously.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Sarah Maben at 817-291-1997 or SarahMaben@mv.unt.edu or the faculty advisor, Dr. Kathleen Whitson UNT Department of Higher Education, at telephone number 940-369-7173.

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Research Participants' Rights: Your clicking the NEXT button below indicates that you understand the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. Print this screen if you would like a copy of this notice.
University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Information Notice

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: Implications of undergraduate student work experience on campus public relations firms on GPA and employment within major field

Principal Investigator: Sarah Maben, a graduate student in the University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Higher Education.

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in a research study that involves a survey of the advisers and graduates from universities with student-run public relations firms. The purpose of the study is to compare effects of working for the student-run public relations firm on undergraduate students.

Study Procedures: You will be asked to answer questions about the student-run public relations firm that will take about 15 minutes of your time.

Foreseeable Risks: No foreseeable risks are involved in this study.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: Advisers would be given the results by request. They may be able to use the information to benefit current and future students. Your participation may help future public relations students.

Compensation for Participants: None.

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: Survey data will be password protected on the online system and any files downloaded to the researcher’s home computer will be password protected too. The institution will receive a code and will be kept separately. Generic monikers would be used in the study’s report if necessary to point out research for a particular institution. The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study. Direct quotes from descriptive passages might be used to illustrate a theme in research findings, but this would be done so anonymously. Contact information collected will only be used to contact advisers interested in having their graduates participate in the larger study.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Sarah Maben at 817-291-1997 or SarahMaben@myunt.edu or the faculty advisor, Dr. Kathleen Whitson UNT Department of Higher Education, at telephone number 940-369-7173.

Office of Research Services
University of North Texas
Last Updated: August 9, 2007

1 of 2
133
Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Research Participants' Rights: Your clicking the NEXT button below indicates that you understand the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. Print this screen if you would like a copy of this notice.
MODIFICATION REQUEST

University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

**Purpose:** Complete this form when you would like to change the key personnel, data collection sites, protocol (e.g., compensation, study procedures, etc.), and/or Informed Consent/Assent Form in a research study that has already received IRB approval. Submit this form along with copies of any new or modified materials or documents you describe below. If modifications are more extensive than can be easily described on this form, please submit a new IRB application (http://research.unt.edu/ors/compliance/human.htm). **NOTE:** You may not implement any changes to an IRB-approved study until your Modification Request has been approved.

Please use a font size of 11 or larger. Check "No" or "Yes" on Items #1-5 and elaborate on "yes" answers as indicated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNT IRB Number: 09307</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title of Project:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPDATED TITLE: IMPLICATIONS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT WORK EXPERIENCE AT CAMPUS PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS ON GPA AND EMPLOYMENT WITHIN MAJOR FIELD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORIGINAL TITLE: EFFECTS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT WORK EXPERIENCE AT CAMPUS PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS ON GPA, YEARS TO GRADUATION AND EMPLOYMENT WITHIN MAJOR FIELD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal Investigator:</strong> Sarah Maben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campus or Mailing Address:</strong> 4018 Ridglea Country Club Drive, No. 507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City: Fort Worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phone:</strong> 817-738-7136 / 817-291-1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Department:</strong> Counseling and Higher Education (higher education program)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. **Are there changes in Key Personnel assisting in the research project?**
   - **X** No
   - ☐ Yes - list changes below and submit a completion certificate for NIH training for all new Key Personnel (unless it is already on file with the IRB from a previous research study).

   List Names and UNT affiliation of new Key Personnel

   List Names of Key Personnel to be Deleted:

2. **Are there any additions or changes to sites where data will be collected?**
   - **X** No
   - ☐ Yes - Identify specific data collection sites or agencies below. In addition, submit a signed letter on official letterhead approving data collection at each site.

3. **Are there any proposed changes to the informed consent/assent form(s)?**
   - ☐ No
   - **X** Yes - provide a *brief* description of and rationale for proposed changes below. In addition, submit two sets of the *revised* informed consent/assent form(s). On one set, highlight everything that differs from your original, approved informed consent/assent form(s).

   - The estimated time was increased from 10 to 15 minutes to accommodate the addition of open-ended questions to the survey instruments.
   - I have added a line to the notice that would address how responses to the newly added open-ended questionnaires on the adviser and student questionnaires will be handled. “Direct quotes from descriptive passages might be used to illustrate a theme in the research findings, but this would be done so anonymously.”
   - I clarified a statement that included “participating institutions would not be indentified.” A list of universities with student-run public relations firms will be included in the appendix of the study. Individual institutions matched to their data would not be identified; generic monikers would be used to highlight distinctions in the research.
4. Are there any proposed changes in the protocol requested (e.g., recruitment procedures, data collection instruments or procedures, compensation)?
   □ No
   X Yes – provide a description of and rationale for proposed changes below (attach an additional page if necessary). In addition, submit copies of any recruitment materials, data collection instruments, etc. that have been modified or added since your last IRB approval of this study.

Open-ended questions were added to the survey instruments to add a descriptive and qualitative element to the study. The pilot study of the quantitative part of the study indicated that more descriptive data might be needed to produce this dissertation.

I have added a line to the recruitment e-mail that would address how responses to the newly added open-ended questionnaires on the adviser and student questionnaires will be handled. “Direct quotes from descriptive passages might be used to illustrate a theme in the research findings, but this would be done so anonymously.” The recruitment letter also shows an estimated time to complete of 15 minutes; it was 10 previously.

The time frame for collecting the adviser questionnaires will be extended to a six week window to accommodate holidays and semester break. If two reminder e-mails do not solicit a response, a follow-up phone call will be made to the adviser.

5. Are there any proposed changes not described above?
   No
   X Yes - provide a brief description of and rationale for the proposed changes.

Research questions have been modified to include a more descriptive element to the study.

1. Is there a significant difference in GPA between undergraduate public relations majors who work for the campus student-run public relations agency and those public relations majors who do not?
2. Is there a significant difference in employment within the field between undergraduate public relations majors who work for the campus student-run public relations agency and those public relations majors who do not?
3. Is there a significant difference in GPA between public relations undergraduates working at Type 1, Type 2 and Type 3 (as defined by Bush, 2009) student-run public relations agencies?
4. Is there a significant difference in employment between public relations undergraduates working at Type 1, Type 2 and Type 3 (as defined by Bush, 2009) student-run public relations agencies?
5. How do public relations majors describe their para-professional experiences working for the student-run public relations agencies?
6. What value, if any, do the undergraduate public relations majors report about their agency work experience?
7. What value, if any, of agency work experience for the undergraduate public relations majors do the advisers of student-run public relations agency report?

**Principal Investigator Assurance:** I certify that the revised information provided for this project is correct and that no other procedures or forms will be used. I confirm that no changes will be implemented until I receive written approval for the changes from the UNT IRB.

Sarah R. Malen  
Signature of Principal Investigator

12-4-09  
Date

Submission of Your Modification Request

1. Print and sign this page.

2. Send/deliver the entire form (including two copies of the changed informed consent form if applicable) as follows:

   Option 1: Email* to Shelia.Bourns@unt.edu

   *Note: if emailing the entire form, image files (i.e. scanned copies) of the signature page, data collection sites approval letters, and other non-word processor documents ARE acceptable; please maintain the originals, which must be supplied to the IRB upon request.

   Option 2: Hand-deliver to: UNT Office of Research Services  
   Hurley Admin. Bldg. 160

   Option 3: Mail to: UNT Office of Research Services  
   1155 Union Circle #305250  
   Denton, TX 76203

Contact Shelia Bourns at (940) 565-3940 or Shelia.Bourns@unt.edu for any questions about your Modification Request.
Application for Initial Review
University of North Texas Institutional Review Board
OHRP Federalwide Assurance: FWA00007479

Save this file as a Word document on your computer, answer all questions completely within Microsoft Word (with track changes turned off), and submit it along with all supplemental documents to the UNT Office of Research Services as described on the Signature Page. Type only in the yellow fields, and closely follow all stated length limits. Handwritten forms will not be accepted.

1. Principal Investigator Information
Must be the same Principal Investigator named in any proposal for external or internal funding.

Sarah Maben
First Name Last Name E-mail
mabens@charter.net/SarahMaben@my.unt.edu

If UNT faculty or staff:

UNT Department UNT Building Room Number
Office Phone Number Fax Number EMPL ID

If UNT student:
4018 Ridglea Country Club Drive No. 507
Home address
Fort Worth, TX 76126
City, State, and Zip Code
817-291-1997 n/a
Home Phone Number Fax Number
Dr. Kathleen Whitson
Faculty Advisor's Name Faculty Advisor's E-mail
Kathleen.Whitson@unt.edu
Higher Education 940-369-7173
Faculty Advisor's UNT Department Faculty Advisor's Office Phone Number

Is this study for your master's thesis or doctoral dissertation? [X] Yes [ ] No
Is this study for your other course work? [ ] Yes [X] No

Under the UNT IRB Guidelines, research conducted solely for satisfying course requirements (other than a master's thesis or a doctoral dissertation) does not require IRB review for approval. Contact the IRB office (shelia.bourns@unt.edu) for clarification if you believe a project conducted for course work may qualify as "Human Subjects Research" under federal guidelines and therefore requires IRB approval.

2. Co-Investigator Information
If applicable; students should include their Faculty Advisor as Co-Investigator only if he/she will be actively involved in conducting the study.

First Name Last Name E-mail

Office Phone Number University or Other Entity

The Co-Investigator's classification is: [ ] Faculty/Staff [ ] Graduate Student

3. Key Personnel
List the names of all other Key Personnel who are responsible for the design, conduct, or reporting of the study. This includes any person who will be recruiting subjects, collecting data, handling personally identifiable data, or disseminating the results.

n/a

NIH Training
Have you and all Key Personnel completed the required NIH training course ("Protecting Human Research Participants") and submitted a copy of the completion certificate to the Office of Research Services in Hurley Admin. Bldg. 160? [X] Yes [ ] No
If "No," this training is required for all Key Personnel before your study can be approved. This free on-line course may be accessed at: http://phrp.nihtraining.com

4. Project Title
Must be identical to the title of any associated internal or external grant proposal.
Effects of undergraduate student work experience at campus public relations firms on GPA, years to graduation and employment within major field

5. Funding Information (if applicable)
Identify the source (project sponsor) of any external and/or internal funding for this project, and attach a complete copy of the funding proposal:
No external or internal funding sources will be sought. The principal investigator will be the source for any needed funds.
Study dates as listed in the funding proposal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start Date (mm/dd/year)</th>
<th>End Date (mm/dd/year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Significant Financial Conflict of Interest
If any external funding is proposed, have you and all Key Personnel submitted a Significant Financial Interest Disclosure form in compliance with the UNT Conflict of Interest Policy for Sponsored Projects? (For more information, see UNT Policy Number 16.12.3.3 at http://www.unt.edu/policy/UNT_Policy/volume3/16_12_3_3.html.)

6. Purpose of Study
In no more than half a page, briefly state the purpose of your study in lay language appropriate for the UNT IRB's community members and faculty members outside of your field; include the hypotheses or research question(s) you intend to answer; avoid cutting and pasting from any funding proposal, master's thesis, or doctoral dissertation; applications submitted with overly-technical or unclear language will be returned to the Principal Investigator for revision before review by the IRB.
The purpose of the study is to determine if there is a difference between undergraduate public relations majors who work for the campus, student-run public relations firm and those public relations majors who do not, on the factors of GPA, years to graduation and securing employment within the field six months after graduation.

Research question: Is there a significant difference in years to graduation, GPA and employment within the field between undergraduate public relations majors who work for the campus student-run public relations firm and those who do not?

Hypothesis: Undergraduate public relations majors who worked for the campus public relations firm will graduate in fewer years, have higher GPA and will have higher employment rates within their major field than public relations majors who do not work for the firm.

7. Previous Research
In no more than half a page, summarize previous research leading to the formulation of this study, including any past or current research conducted by the Principal Investigator or key personnel that leads directly to the formulation of this study.
A review of literature led to this study. A benchmarking investigation of institution web sites was conducted to see how many student-run public relations firms exist at U.S. higher education institutions.

8. Informed Consent Forms
Written Informed Consent Forms signed by the subject or the subject's legally authorized representative are required for most research projects with human participants (exceptions include telephone surveys, internet surveys, and special circumstances for which an Informed Consent Notice may be substituted). If any subjects will be children (under 18 years of age in Texas), the parent/guardian Informed Consent Form must be accompanied by a Child/Student Assent Form for obtaining assent by children ages 7-17. Templates for creating consent/assent forms are located on the Office of Research Services website at http://research.unt.edu/ors/compliance/human.htm. All consent/assent documents to be used must be submitted before IRB review can begin.
Indicate types of consent/assent documents to be used (check all that apply):

- [ ] Informed Consent Form
- [X] Student/Child Assent (children ages 7-17)
- [ ] Consent Notice
9. Foreign Languages
Will your study involve the use of any language other than English for Informed Consent Forms, data collection instruments, or recruitment materials?

☐ Yes  ☒ No
If "Yes", identify all foreign languages below (Please do not submit any foreign language forms or materials until after the IRB has approved the English versions):

10. Informed Consent
Describe the steps for obtaining the subjects' informed consent/assent (by whom, where, when, etc.).
Public relations graduate survey: Prior to participating in the online questionnaire, the informed consent message will appear on the first screen of the survey. Participants will select to consent to the survey to progress to the next part of the online questionnaire.
Public relations firm adviser survey: Prior to participating in the online questionnaire, the informed consent message will appear on the first screen of the survey. Participants will select to consent to the survey to progress to the next part of the online questionnaire.

11. Medications
Do you have reason to expect that potential subjects will be under the influence of any medication, drugs or stressful condition which could diminish their ability to give effective informed consent?

☐ Yes  ☒ No
If "Yes," please explain and describe what steps you will take to verify that potential subjects possess the mental capacity to give meaningful informed consent to participate in the study.

12. Location of Study
Identify all locations where the study will be conducted. For each data collection site other than UNT, attach a signed and dated original of a letter on the cooperating institution's letterhead giving approval for collection of data at that site. This letter should reflect an understanding of the nature of the study and how it will be conducted. Note: review of the application by the IRB can begin without the outside approval, if obtaining such approval at this stage is not practicable. However, request for review prior to submitting approval letters must be accompanied by an explanation for why site approval is not yet available AND acknowledgement that approval letters must be submitted, reviewed, and approved prior to data collection at any site.
Collection sites will be selected based on data collected from the public relations firm adviser questionnaire. The survey to advisers will help identify universities with on-campus, student-run public relations firms that would be willing to participate and have e-mail access to their graduates.

The reason sites have not been selected is that a preliminary benchmarking project using institution web sites shows a great diversity in the level of student-run public relations firms in U.S. universities. Some are more like clubs and other are more like businesses with a client base. This study aims to look at the work experience and will target the firms with a more professional, work-like atmosphere.

Once identified, the cooperating institutions would be asked for a letter on institution letterhead giving approval for collection of data at the site. It is understood that no data would be collected until the approval letters were submitted, reviewed and approved by IRB. All data collection would be handled via online survey system.

13. Recruitment Population
Describe the population from which the subjects (including controls, if applicable) will be recruited.
The population will include recent journalism/public relations majors who graduated from U.S. universities with student-run public relation firms. Based on responses from advisers of the student-run firms in an adviser questionnaire, universities with more professional, work-like student-run public relations firms will be included.

14. Subject Recruitment
Describe how you will recruit subjects to participate in the study; attach a copy of all recruitment materials (newspaper advertisements, posters, telephone scripts, etc.). Subjects would be recruited to participate in the study with an e-mail including a hyperlink to the actual questionnaire. A second and third follow up e-mail will be sent to prospective participants.

15. Subject Population Composition
Describe the anticipated gender, racial/ethnic composition, age range and health status of the study population and the criteria for inclusion or exclusion of any subpopulation.
The population composition will be graduates from journalism/public relations programs in U.S. universities with student-run public relations firms. It is estimated that gender, racial/ethnic and health status will align with enrollments in the programs. The age of respondents could vary, but will probably fall into the 21-35 range.

16. Vulnerable Populations
Please identify any vulnerable populations who will specifically be targeted for participation in this study:
- [ ] Children (under 18 years of age)
- [ ] Pregnant women
- [ ] Prisoners, including juveniles
- [ ] Mentally impaired or mentally retarded
If any boxes are checked, describe any special precautions to be taken in your study due to the inclusion of these populations:

17. Number of Participants
Total number of subjects (separate numbers for experimental participants and controls if applicable):
- Adviser Questionnaire: estimated 50 advisers;
- Pilot Study: between 10 and 25 public relations graduates from one university with a mix of those who worked for the student-run public relations firm and those who did not;
- Graduate Questionnaire: at least 50 public relations graduates who worked for a student-run firm and at least 50 public relations graduates who did not

18. Data Collection
Describe all procedures you will use to collect data (interventions, interviews, surveys, focus groups, observation, review of existing records, etc.). **Attach a copy of all intervention protocols, data collection instruments and interview scripts to be used.**
Surveys will be used to collect data from the advisers of student-run public relations firms at U.S. universities and the graduates from selected programs. A pilot version of the survey will be issued to one university’s public relations graduates. If changes to the questionnaire are necessary after the pilot, revised copies of the instrument would be submitted for IRB approval.

19. Time
Estimate the total time each subject will be involved in the study (include time per session, total number of sessions, etc.).
- Adviser questionnaire: Advisers will be asked to participate in one online questionnaire instrument that is estimated to take fewer than 10 minutes, including time to read the consent message. Advisers willing to help the researcher connect with graduates may spend some time in this capacity, like forwarding an e-mail questionnaire message to graduates.
- Graduate questionnaire: The journalism/public relations graduates will be asked to participate in one online questionnaire instrument that is estimated to take fewer than 10 minutes, including time to read the consent message.

20. Compensation
Describe any payment or other compensation subjects will receive for participating in the study; include description of the timing for payment and any conditions for receipt of such compensation:
There will be no compensation. Copies of the finished research would be made available to those requesting it.

21. Risks and Precautions
Describe any foreseeable risks to subjects presented by the procedures described above in the Data Collection section, including any physical, psychological, social, economic, legal, or confidentiality risks (see the UNT IRB Guidelines for more information about these risks). Include your assessment of the degree of likelihood for each risk presented and all precautions you will take to minimize such risks or to respond to adverse events.
The only physical risks would be those associated with everyday computer usage because the questionnaire will be delivered via e-mail hyper-linking to an online survey system.

Psychological risks: there are none known or anticipated.

The nature of the questionnaire should not evoke legal, social or economic risks. The questions do not delve into these areas; they are focused on the student undergraduate experience connected to the student-run public relations firm.

Confidentiality risks are low. The questionnaire for students will be administered anonymously through an online survey system. On the questionnaire administered to the advisers of the student-run public relations firms, names will be sought if the adviser expresses interest in helping the researcher connect with the institution’s graduates. The institution will receive a code and will be kept separately. Survey data will be password protected on the online system and any files downloaded to the researcher’s home computer will be password protected too. Institutions participating in the study would not be disclosed and generic monikers would be used if necessary to point out in the research.

22. Benefits
Describe the benefits to the subjects (explain how the subjects will benefit from participating in the study, other than any compensation described in the Compensation section above). Even if the subjects will not directly benefit from the research, explain how the study will benefit others or contribute to your field of research:
The graduates would not benefit from the study. Advisers would be given the results for their universities by request. They may be able to use the information to benefit current and future students. The study will shed light on differences between undergraduate students who work for the student-run public relations firm and those who do not. If there is a significant difference, the study paves the way for additional research. Policy could be impacted if there is a significant difference. Student-run public relations firms could see additional funding or increases to their staff size to accommodate more students. If there is not a significant difference, it is unlikely that the study would be used to close down student-run firms on campuses.

23. HIPAA
Will your study involve obtaining individually identifiable health information from health care plans, health care clearinghouses, or health care providers?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If “Yes,” describe the procedures you will use to comply with the HIPAA Privacy Rule. (For more information about HIPAA, see the HIPAA Guidance page on the UNT Research Services website at http://research.unt.edu/orr/compliance/hipaa.htm.)

24. Confidentiality of Research Records
Describe the procedures you will use to maintain the confidentiality of any personally identifiable data (including any video-recordings and/or audio-recordings of the participants).
Adviser questionnaire: This information will be acquired through an online survey system and adviser name and university name will be identifiable to the researcher. A password protected online survey system will be used. Statistical files will be limited to the principal investigator's home computer, which will be password protected. Institution names will be coded and kept separately.
Graduate questionnaire: Using an online survey system, respondents will not be identifiable by name. They will only be identifiable by university, which will be coded and kept separately.
Please specify where your research records will be maintained, any coding or other steps you will take to separate participants' names/identities from research data, and how long you will retain personally identifiable data in your research records. Federal IRB regulations require that the investigator's research records be maintained for 3 years following the end of the study.
Graduate questionnaire: Using an online survey system, respondents will not be identifiable by name. They will only be identifiable by university, which will be coded and kept separately.
Identify the categories of all persons other than the investigator(s) to whom personally identifiable data of participants will be disclosed and the purpose of such disclosure.
Dr. Kathleen Whitson, dissertation committee chair, would be the only one and it would be to help the researcher properly and accurately give generic monikers to the institutions if used in a descriptive nature in the dissertation.

25. Publication of Results
Please identify all methods in which you plan to publicly disseminate the results of your study (academic journal, academic conference, thesis or dissertation, etc.).
Research results will be disseminated in the form of a dissertation and possible presentation at conference or publication in an academic journal.
IRB Application Signature Page

Principal Investigator
I certify that the information in this application is complete and accurate. I agree to conduct this study in accordance with the UNT IRB Guidelines and the study procedures and forms approved by the UNT IRB. I agree that I will not make any changes to the approved procedures or forms without prior written approval from the UNT IRB. I understand that I can not initiate any contact with human subjects until I have received written UNT IRB approval.

Sarah [Signature]  
July 23, 2009  

Faculty Advisor (if applicable)
DO NOT SIGN until you can fully attest to the following: I have thoroughly reviewed and approved this completed application. I am satisfied with the adequacy of the proposed research design and the precautions to be taken for the protection of human subjects. I am also satisfied that this IRB application is clear and complete. My oversight of this study will include verification that it is being conducted in accordance with the UNT IRB Guidelines and the study procedures and forms approved by the UNT IRB. I agree that no changes will be made to the approved procedures or forms without prior written approval from the UNT IRB.

Kathleen [Signature]  
July 23, 2009  

Submission of Your Application and Supplementary Documents

Print and sign this page. If you are a student, your Faculty Advisor must review the application and also sign this page.

Assemble all supplementary documents, including:
Copies of all NIH Training completion certificates not previously submitted to the Office of Research Services;  
A copy of any proposal for internal or external funding for this study;  
The original of the approval letters from all cooperating institutions (other than UNT) where you will collect data;  
A copy of all recruitment materials;  
A copy of all informed consent forms; and  
A copy of all data collection instruments, interview scripts, and intervention protocols.

Send/deliver the entire application (including this Signature Page) and all supplementary documents as follows:

Option 1: E-mail (preferred*) to officeofresearch@unt.edu

*Note: if e-mailing entire application, image files (i.e., scanned copies) of the signature page, approval letters, and other non-word-processor documents ARE acceptable; please maintain the originals, which must be supplied to the IRB upon request.

Option 2: Hand-deliver to: UNT Office of Research Services  
Hurley Admin. Bldg. 160

Option 3: Mail to: UNT Office of Research Services  
P.O. Box 305250-5250  
Denton, TX 76203

Contact Shelia Bours at (940) 565-3940 or shelia.bourns@unt.edu for any questions about your application.
Sample Recruitment Letter (to be e-mailed to advisers of student-run public relations firms)

Dear Student-Run Public Relations Adviser,
I am conducting a study for my dissertation that looks at student-run public relations firms. Your responses to this survey will help create a body of knowledge on student-run public relations firms and will provide a base from which a larger study of graduates can be conducted.

You were selected to participate because of your knowledge of the student-run public relations firm on your campus. It is important to collect this data so we can explore how student work experience at the student-run public relations firm affects students.

The survey has been structured for your convenience and you will find it quick and easy to complete. I estimate it will take about 15 minutes to complete. At your request, you could receive a copy of the results, which you may be able to use to benefit current and future students.

I am also looking for help to connect with your graduates. A student questionnaire, similar in length, has been crafted. Would you be willing to have your graduates participate in the student version of this study? If yes, please mark the corresponding answer in the survey and I’ll follow up with you.

This survey costs nothing to complete and your information will be confidential. Contact information collected would only be used to contact those advisers interested in having their graduates participate in the larger study. The results will be reported as statistics for the group and not as specific individual surveys. Direct quotes from descriptive passages might be used to illustrate themes in the research findings, but this would be done so anonymously. I anticipate the overall results will be published in an academic journal and presentations would be made at conferences.

Click on the hyperlink to begin the survey or copy and paste the URL into your favorite browser.

http://www.surveymonkey.com.....

Thank you in advance for your participation. Your feedback is vital to this research.

Sincerely,

Sarah Maben
Doctoral Student
University of North Texas
mabens@charter.net
817-291-1997
Sample Recruitment Letter (to be e-mailed to public relations graduates from universities with student-run public relations firms)

Dear Graduate,

This is a study for my dissertation, which looks at public relations undergraduates. Your responses to this survey will help create a body of knowledge on public relations graduates.

You were selected to participate because you are a public relations graduate from a university participating in this study. It is important to collect this data so we can explore undergraduate student experience as it relates to public relations. Whether your experience was good or bad or somewhere in between, this is your opportunity to give feedback.

The survey has been structured for your convenience and you will find it quick and easy to complete. I estimate it will take you about 15 minutes to complete. At your request, you could receive a copy of the results, which may benefit current and future public relations students.

This survey costs nothing to complete and your information will be confidential. The results will be reported as statistics for the group and not as specific individual surveys. Direct quotes from descriptive passages might be used to illustrate a theme in the research findings, but this would be done so anonymously. I anticipate the overall results will be published in an academic journal and presentations would be made at conferences.

Click on the hyperlink to begin the survey or copy and paste the URL into your favorite browser.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=TZVq1owjGffQZE2C1L_2bHWw_3d_3d

Thank you in advance for your participation. Your feedback is vital to this research.

Sincerely,

Sarah Maben
Doctoral Student
University of North Texas
mabens@charter.net
817-291-1997
REFERENCES


