# CERTIFICATION IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

## REPORT OF REVIEW TEAM

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Standard One: Public Relations Curriculum

Current classes contain all of the knowledge and most of the skills specified in the 1999 Report of the Commission on Public Relations Education. The current course of instruction is outlined below. Following the self study the department proposes to change several of the classes to more closely align their courses with the curriculum recommended in the 1999 Report of the Commission on Public Relations Education. The proposal is attached to this review and is strongly supported by the reviewing team.

Core classes required of public relations majors (and all mass comm. students):

- MC 101 Mass Communication and Society
- MC 201 Writing for the Mass Media
- MC 301 Theory and research of Mass Communication
- MC 496 Internship/Practicum
- MC 401 Communication Law
- UI 382 History and Philosophy of Mass Media

Existing package of public relations classes:

- MC 322 Publication Design
- MC 330 Principles of Public Relations
- MC 332 Publicity Techniques
- MC 434 Public Relations Case Studies
- MC 482 Special Problems/Topics

The BS degree requires 120 semester hours. Eighty-three hours are in general education classes, including 68 hours in arts and sciences (69%). Thirty-six hours are in public relations/mass communication (31%). Students must select a minor from outside the major.

We are not aware of any other public relations program that has anything like the Special Problems/Topics (MC 482) class. It is special and separates this program from all others. It requires a huge investment of faculty time and a moderate investment of money. We believe that this program should be fully supported by the University.

We found two areas of the public relations curriculum where more attention was needed: public relations writing and public relations research. Both of these areas will be addressed with the attached new curriculum. Under the proposal, public relations students will be taking an additional research class that covers skills relating to social science research: interviews, focus groups and surveys. Public relations students need to be able to do these activities and see how research is applied in public relations programming.

The new Public Relations Writing class will build on the basic journalism writing class (MC 201) and will be part of the public relation score for public relations students (see attached self study proposal). We support the shift in MC 201 away from introducing
styles and forms needed in public relations and advertising and towards a strong journalism writing class.

The Case Studies class will change its name and concept to a Public Relations Campaigns class. It will serve as a capstone class and provide actual experience with a client.

The University maintains a placement office for seniors and graduates. Job skills are obtained through the internship class (MC 496) and special sessions are conducted by Dr. Gunders at the department level. Bulletin boards in the building announce jobs. PRSSA students can use the PRSSA national Website to search for jobs anywhere in the country.

Internship sponsors interviewed expressed positive and sometimes glowing remarks about Southeast Missouri State University students. . . their performance, their results, their hard work, and the Department. They believe students are exposed to broad array of subjects. The relationship between student and employer is successful, rewarding, and high caliber; students are prepared to work when they enter the door. The students are well versed and several have been outstanding.

In general, alumni feel the Mass Communication department performs a great job when using alumni and professionals. Alumni who have taught Special Topics courses depart wishing the courses would have been available for them.

“The program courses touch on all the angles of public relations such as writing for newspaper style, graphic design and the history of public relations and mass communication. It is important to know the history of the industry as it is expected ‘in the real world’ that you get what the business is all about. SEMO does a good job of presenting all these elements and then empowering the students to showcase that talent with real life case studies.”

“You can tell that the department does a wonderful job because of their reputation in Illinois. I understand that local high school students who are interested in mass communication say they hear that SEMO offers a better public relations program, and is more ‘one-on-one’ with their students. That makes my day, considering I am an alum.”

Confusing majors
Within the Department of Communication there exists a BA in Communication with a public relations concentration. There also exists a BS in corporate communication. The professional world will treat these as identical although the curricula are different. Graduates from both programs will be expected to have public relations knowledge, skills and abilities. The chair should examine these programs with an eye to combining them.
Standard Two: Public Relations Faculty (Full- and Part-time)

Two full-time faculty work with 134 public relations majors. There is strong interest among students waiting to enter the program.

Susan Gonders, Ed.D., has more than 20 years of professional experience in publishing and graphic arts, public relations and advertising. She has 12 years of full-time teaching at the college level. She plans to sit for the APR (accredited in public relations) exam in the next year if she can make time to concentrate her study. We support her wish to demonstrate her professional knowledge.

Anthony Hicks, APR, has a master's degree and strong professional background in public relations. He is a highly regarded public relations professional in his first year of teaching. He has worked in global communications with FedEx, was a senior communications specialist at TVA, and was the public relations director at Delaware State University. His journalism experience includes work at the daily Arkansas Gazette and the daily Memphis Commercial Appeal.

There are no part-time faculty actively involved in courses other than the Special Topics class (MC 482).

Southeast Missouri State emphasizes teaching; both faculty are nationally known. Dr. Gonders participates in the PRSA Educators Academy (past and current newsletter editor and current board member). She is active in AEJMC conference presentations and on panels. She has served as the public relations division newsletter editor for seven years.

The faculty currently teach a 4 – 4 load. We believe Dr. Gonders should seek release time for her special topics class and other duties assigned by the department. We think there is merit in the equity argument for relief similar to the radio station coordinator, the video production coordinator and the newspaper adviser.

Alumni told us that they were 'very thankful for their SEMO education. The professors always worked well together, and were very committed in their efforts to make our major (PR) a very significant part of our lives.'

Current students like the group projects, the small campus, and that for upper level students, it was like a family.
Standard Three: Resources, Equipment and Facilities

The money seems to be fairly distributed among concentrations. More than $1 million was received in 2004 for equipment and facility improvements. The operating budget increased in 2004, and remains steady.

Most department classrooms are “smart” and computer equipment is new. Several large labs with generous hours are available to students, plus a smaller Mac lab that is used primarily by the public relations majors. Although we understand that room 118 can become crowded, we did not witness overcrowding during our visit.

The Kent Library is undergoing remodeling to provide a large computer lab with state-of-the-art equipment. The first floor also provides computer work stations and a coffee bar atmosphere. We understand the book and journal collections are adequately funded. Databases are typical of a modern university library.

The public relations students use and value the “writing lab” located in Kent Library. Many faculty recommend, and some require, students to use this facility in general, or for specific classes.

Students interviewed said the labs (both Mac and PC) are open long enough for their needs. This college does not require students to bring their own computer, therefore the University must provide sufficient equipment at convenient hours to allow students to work around their class schedules.
Standard Four: Public Relations Students

Recruitment: High school students are annually invited to attend the University for a campus tour and a mini-college fair. Potential undergraduates explore what the University offers, and then meet with Mass Communication faculty to discuss possible majors.

The Alumni gave high marks to the faculty for counseling, mentoring and advising them. Some of the alum said they remain close to the university and students and see this positive trend in academic advising continuing.

Students are assigned to a faculty adviser. A students must initiate a change if initial assignment is not in his/her area of concentration. Students cannot enroll until they meet with their adviser. A record of the advising session and classes chosen is collected and stored in locked department files.

Career matters and goals are discussed in class. Dr. Gonders conducts career workshops. There currently exists a senior seminar that supports transitioning from school to work.

Internships

The Internship coordinator is very knowledgeable and energetic. She helps students with employment leads, but they must secure the position as they would a job. She provides guidance throughout the internship process and carefully screens sponsors as well as the students’ capabilities before they apply for an internship. The coordinator also responds to leads from other parts of the University.

The Internship coordinator conducts on-site visits with students and their supervisors, meeting with them together and separately. Students are required to submit weekly progress reports to the coordinator during their 180-hour internship. Students must also complete a self evaluation form at the conclusion of their employment.

The department Website for internship procedures and requirements is clean, easy to understand, and complete. The explanation of the program is well done.

The department has extra funds to support the internship program. Most students and alumni said the internship program prepared them for the workforce upon graduation.

Alumni believe they were prepared for the work place. “I felt very prepared to work after graduation; however, it would have helped if the school assisted with employment opportunities.”

A couple internship sponsors commented that students should receive instructions about “attitude” prior to starting their employment.
Standard Five: Assessment

An assessment plan was established prior to the ACEJMC visit. The plan has multiple measures for each course. Data were collected in 2004-5. The department is implementing improvements this year.

The minimum requirement for a new major: 15 hours of completed coursework with GPA of 2.5 or higher (cum. and in major). Students must maintain 2.5 GPA throughout. If below 2.5, the student has one semester to bring it up. If it remains below, students go to central advising for the college.

The chair has conducted exit interviews for years. Dr. Towns will share the results with all faculty. Faculty members are evaluated by students using the University-wide standardized IDEA system.
Standard Six: Relationships with Alumni and Professionals

There continues to be a limited relationship with the sponsoring St. Louis chapter. The designated Professional Adviser does not return calls or e-mail. However, PRSSA officers are in the process of making arrangement for members to share activities at other locations, i.e., partnering with the PRSSA Chapter at Carbondale, Ill.

The Southeast PRSSA chapter participates in the annual ProAm Day sponsored by the St. Louis PRSA Chapter. And, students experience face-to-face professional contact through their one-hour Special Topics courses (three courses are required).

Current students agree that they have good exposure to professionals; however, they would like to have a PRSA chapter fill the role of chapter sponsor so more interaction with working pros could occur.

The faculty makes a strong effort to bring in professionals:
   1. MC 482 Special Problems/Topics instructors, and
   2. Guest speakers in the classroom who represent the public relations profession.

Alumni comments reflect a solid support that students receive professional exposure. Many alumni and PRSA members serve as adjunct faculty members or special topics instructors. Both students and alumni state that the special topics courses are valuable because they cover topics not found in standard text books; plus, the classes offer a unique insight for students that they can’t receive at many universities. The special topics program is unique.

"Southeast is headed in the right direction with the Professional Advisory Council that meets yearly to discuss the department. I’d like to see that group more involved in the decision-making process and have our opinions requested more often," according to one alum. The department chair said they are preparing to launch a new initiative with the council.

Several alumni noted they continue to work closely with the school and the students. One stated she has seen a "great improvement over the years with alumni relations."
Standard Seven: Relationships with Total Unit and University

Many faculty and administrators are impressed with the 2004 receipt of accreditation from the ACEJMC. They believe the department has a good reputation both within and outside the University, and they support the PR/Mass Communication programs.

Non-public relations faculty members have expressed that they believe the public relations program is one of integrity; that it is valuable and energized. Some have only a few, if any, public relations majors in their classes. Several faculty members said they have guided freshmen toward the public relations major; monitoring students who express an interest in public relations as a profession.

External faculty said students as a whole have represented the department and the university well. Many cited the track record of public relations graduates as a real positive result of the public relations faculty and the quality of students in the program.

Dr. Gonders has won the outstanding teaching award at the University.
Standard Eight: PRSSA Chapter

The sponsoring chapter is St. Louis, and there has been minimal contact with the PRSSA group, although students have made numerous attempts to contact the professional co-adviser of record. The students do attend and benefit from the St. Louis annual ProAm Day. Southeast’s Alumni Association employee, Doug McDermott, will step up as professional adviser in the Fall.

The chapter has 42 paid members. About 14 are active, attending meetings and working on projects. Those who regularly participate are developing a chapter Website for launch in the summer of 2006. In late April, leaders of the chapter and the student firm will address freshman and sophomore classes as part of their membership campaign. Leaders know that success lies in a proper succession plan of leadership and members.

PRSSA members are researching non-profit organizations to select a few to volunteer for and assist during the 2006-07 school year. Members and other public relations majors are volunteering for a May 2006 special event auction with the Southeast Missouri Hospital Foundation. Next fall, students will propose a plan to assist with the entire 2007 event.

For a late September 2006 program, members will each share a case study of their individual internships. Members will also assist with an on-campus event in the Fall involving food and beverage organizations/companies.

Student-run firm adviser, Anthony Hicks, APR, has been a major influence on the students both in the classroom and out. He is a strong advocate of what the chapter can accomplish with the caliber of students enrolled at Southeast.

Dr. Susan Gonders is the PRSSA Faculty Adviser. Students cannot praise her enough when it comes to her dedication, abilities and devotion. They believe their relationship with her is one-of-a-kind and they greatly appreciate her.

The student-run firm

The firm, Southeast Creative Communications, was revived and revitalized in the fall of 2005. General Manager Shad Burner is a senior and a professional young man who has great potential in public relations. The firm’s logo and brochure are appealing and well designed; the website, www.ourmission-yourmessage.com, is clean, informative and easy to follow. Firm members work closely with PRSSA chapter members.

The new firm adviser is Doug McDermott, alumni relations and development staff at Southeast. He is a graduate of the university, a guest lecturer, and a member of the St. Louis Chapter of PRSA. Students say he is a great addition to the team; and, McDermott is looking forward to the relationship.
The Fall 2005 semester for the firm was devoted to paying clients in order to build a nest egg for expenses and growth. In the Spring 2006 semester they created a new logo for a paying client, a campus brochure for another department, and other work. The four titled staff members, along with support staff, are well on their way to developing an effective working model for future stability and growth, including a staff succession plan. Staff positions are not limited to public relations majors; marketing and advertising majors contribute in leadership roles and as staff support.

The firm, like PRSSA, needs a locking file cabinet and space to work and hold meetings. The Resource Library is a great location to answer the needs of both student organizations while retaining its current function.
Standard Nine: Diversity

The area served by Southeast Missouri State University (25 counties) has a minority population of 11%.

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<th>Minority population in:</th>
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<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mass Comm.</td>
<td>16%</td>
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The department has a 5-year diversity plan that ended in 2004. The department is working on extending it.

The public relations faculty includes: one white female and one black male. The student internship coordinator is American Indian.

The Special Problems/Topics (MC 482) provides additional opportunities to bring minority speakers to the campus and they have been sensitive to this concern.
SUMMARY:

This is a regional university with a student body of around 10,000. The mass communication and speech part of the department of speech and theater were merged a few years ago, and have been working together to make the union work. From what we can tell, the public relations program has come a long way. We believe the attached proposal will solidify the curriculum for a number of years.

Strengths:

- Strong faculty, fully dedicated to student success
- Reasonably new technology in the labs and classrooms
- Eager student body who want to be partners in their education
- Strong special topics program that brings experts to campus. This has the potential to keep the program fresh and on the cutting edge in an era of continual change.
- Strong emphasis on graphic arts and design

Weaknesses:

- More emphasis on basic public relations writing and social science research techniques.
- Potential to burn out limited public relations faculty.

RECOMMENDATION OF REVIEW TEAM:

- Support adoption of the proposed curriculum change (see attached self-study proposal). It brings the curriculum into alignment with the accrediting standards.
- Install SPSS in PC labs (lower floor Gravel Bldg.) in support of new public relations research class.
- Seek stable funding for the Special Topics class.
- Dr. Gonders should seek release time for her special topics class and other duties assigned by the department. We think there is merit in the equity argument for relief similar to the radio station coordinator, the video production coordinator and the newspaper adviser.
- The chair should examine the BS in Comm./public relations and the BS in corporate communications with an eye to combining them.
- Obtain a locking file cabinet and space for the student-run firm and PRSSA to store materials.
- Staff should try to secure more paying internship sponsors. Seek assistance from alumni to help with the internship program and the alumni relations program. This will expand the quality of internship experiences, and the category of choices.

RECOMMENDATION OF REVIEW TEAM: Certification
Curriculum plan rationale based on self-study:

No change in 100-level and 200-level courses.

Addition of a Mass Communication Editing Examination, to be taken after MC 201 and before full admission, has been approved by the Curriculum Committee and the chair.

The proposal has strong support and will come for a vote of the department faculty May 1.

Current curriculum:

EN 100/140 English Composition
MC 101 Mass Communication & Society overview of mass comm and its role in society
MA 155 Probability and Statistics research sampling and statistics
MC 201 Writing for the Mass Media writing for print and broadcast media
MC 301 Mass Comm Theory and Research communication theory; research methodology, instrumentation and analysis
U1 382 History and Philosophy of Mass Media

Revised curriculum:

EN 100/140 English Composition
MC 101 Mass Communication & Society overview of mass comm and its role in society
MA 155 Probability and Statistics research sampling and statistics
MC 201 Writing for the Mass Media writing for print and broadcast media
MC 301 Mass Comm Theory and Research communication theory; research methodology, instrumentation and analysis
U1 382 History and Philosophy of Mass Media

Significant changes in 300-level courses already approved by the Curriculum Committee and the chair.

Move the unit on global focus studies from MC 332 to 330.

As per recommendation from the Journalism Task Force, make MC 322 Publication Design a course specifically for journalism majors. For public relations majors, replace it with a new course, MC 334 Public Relations Writing and Design. Building on MC 201 writing skills, the focus will be on writing, editing and composition for print, broadcast and web.

Change MC 332 from Publicity Techniques to Public Relations Research and Strategy. Building on MC 201 writing skills, as well as MA 155 and MC 301 research skills, the focus will be on conducting research and writing strategic research-driven messages for clients for specific target publics.

Minor changes in 400-level courses:

Already approved for implementation in fall 2006: Cut MC 402 Senior Seminar in Mass Comm and replace with 6 elective MC hours to provide the opportunity for greater concentration.

Already approved for implementation in spring 2007: Replace MC 482 with MC 430 Strategic Communication Topics.

Change MC 434 Public Relations Case Studies/Campaigns to Public Relations Campaigns. Case studies will remain the secondary focus with the primary focus on campaigns for clients and sponsors such as events, crisis management, client relations, minority audiences, and ethical issues.

Change MC 486/496 Internship/Practicum to MC 496, full admission to mass comm for 6 elective MC hours.