2013-2014 Assessment Report  
Program: Public Relations, BA  

College of Liberal Arts  
School of Communication & Journalism  
Public Relations, BA  

Expected Outcome 1: Effective Writing and speaking skills  

As a stated learning objective, we have stated that public relations majors should have a mastery of written and oral communication.

**Assessment Method 1:** Survey of public relations majors

**Assessment Method Description**

We administered a survey to junior and senior public relations majors over the course of the 2013 calendar year (spring and fall semesters). 136 students participated in the survey. Responses to survey questions were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” Survey questions included items such as “I developed writing skills”, “I learned how to communicate more effectively”, and “I learned to deliberate.”

**Findings**

Findings from the survey show a discrepancy in the skill set public relations students feel they master. With respect to writing skill questions, approximately 80% of respondents strongly agree or agree that their writing skills are developed effectively. The reverse was found for oral skills. On survey items measuring speaking skill proficiency, approximately 23% of students strongly agreed or agreed that their oral skills were improved through their classwork.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

Based on survey responses, students feel that that PR classes are not as good at developing their speaking skills as they are in developing their writing skills. To help improve oral proficiency, additional oral presentation measures will be implemented in public relations classes, such as requiring each student to present and be graded on their presentation during group presentations in Survey Research Methods and Campaigns, adding in discussion components to Foundations of Public Relations, and discussing the additional of an oral participation grade component to class grading.

**Additional Comments**
Assessment Method 2: Internship reports

Assessment Method Description

All public relations students are required to have an internship after completing the required courses in the public relations curriculum plan. Supervisors submit an evaluation at the completion of the internship, rating their satisfaction of the interns’ written and oral communication skills. The scale is a 5-item Likert scale ranging from “Poor” to “Excellent”. Supervisors may also provide qualitative comments. All reports took place during the 2013 year over three semesters – spring, summer, and fall. 68 students were evaluated during this time period.

Students are required to complete a report at the end of their internship. The report requires six components; a) review of internship activities, b) critical assessment of internship experience, c) critical assessment of preparation, d) analysis of the value of internship relative to career goals, e) suggestions for improvement, and f) work samples. Again, these reports were turned in by 68 students during the 2013 year over three semesters – spring, summer, and fall.

Findings

- Findings from the quantitative internship reports were extremely positive. The majority of the findings showed supervisors rating the interns as having above average or excellent speaking and writing skills. Of the 68 reports, only three supervisors noted average written and oral skills. No ratings of below average or poor were given.
- Comments from students continuously noted they felt extremely prepared for all writing tasks through from their coursework, and could handle any writing assignment given to them by their supervisor. Students noted some learning curve was needed with respect to writing on social media platforms.

How did you use findings for improvement?

- Given the excellent ratings our students received and their outstanding performance in this area, we are now looking to focus the evaluation report so that we may receive more exact data which will help us pinpoint more specific areas of weakness in our students’ skillsets. We are working on generating new questions that look specifically at the quality of writing performed in specific areas (as opposed to an overall writing evaluation) as well as specific areas of professional oral communication (pitching, presentations, etc.).
- In order to continue to increase the student skill sets, we will begin to incorporate more of a multimedia element into the Writing for Public Relations course to get the students more familiar with and comfortable writing in a multimedia environment.

Additional Comments
Assessment Method 3: Survey of public relations alumni

Assessment Method Description

The school surveyed 95 public relations graduates. Questions included “How useful were the courses required in your major in your current job?”, “How useful were the oral communication classes that you took?”, “How useful were the writing classes that you took?”, and “How useful were the client campaign (project-based) classes that you took?” Responses to survey questions were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Extremely useful” to “Not useful”.

Findings

64% of respondents found the courses to be extremely or very useful to their current job. 73% of respondents found oral communication classes to be extremely or very useful. Those who felt the courses were not useful noted public speaking was either never a part of their career, or they did not feel comfortable in oral presentations until going to graduate school. Responses noted not enough emphasis was put on nonverbal cues and body language during presentations. 76% of respondents noted writing courses were extremely or very useful, with those who did not find them useful citing the journalism courses as being irrelevant to their current profession. With respect to the client-based courses, 56% of respondents found the courses to be extremely or very useful, noting projects did not always mirror real-life situations, internships gave better experience, and clients were not always typical PR clients.

How did you use findings for improvement?

As noted above, additional oral presentation measures will be implemented. The faculty will note the importance of all aspects of oral presentation, including the nonverbal elements (professional dress, eye contact, hand gestures, etc.). Additionally, when securing clients for client-based courses, faculty will work to ensure that the project the students will be working on is public relations-focused.

Additional Comments

None.
Expected Outcome 2: Job Placement

**Assessment Method 1:** Alumni Survey

**Assessment Method Description**

The school surveyed 95 public relations graduates. Questions on the survey address how satisfied alumni are with current positions, how long it took them to obtain a job, and resources that helped them obtain employment.

**Findings**

91% of alumni surveyed report being very satisfied or satisfied with their current position. 76% of those surveyed found a job within six months of graduation, with 61% of those finding employment within three months. Respondents reported factors helping secure their first position included prior job or internship, department contact, resume/direct application, online job site, on-campus media, classified ad, personal contact/networking, and ‘other’. Of the previously mentioned categories, prior job or internship, resume/direct application, and personal contact/networking were rated the most significant factors in helping to secure a position, with 53%, 41%, and 54% of respondents indicating those factors, respectively.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

We feel that the job placement rate among our alumni is excellent. We will continue to survey recent alumni, but plan to add targeted questions that ask what resources they feel are lacking in helping them obtain employment. In the past year, we have begun a mentor program with our Public Relations Advisory Council, comprised of alumni, and we will continue to build this program to encourage the networking aspect among our students and alumni.

**Additional Comments**

None.

Expected outcome 3: Professional Internship

All public relations majors will complete a professional internship. Public relations majors should be prepared to enter the work force by learning skills such as collaboration, organization, deliberation, strategy, situation analysis, and application of problem solving skills.

**Assessment Method 1:** On-site supervisor internship report

**Assessment Method Description**
Supervisors submit an evaluation at the completion of the internship, rating their satisfaction of the interns’ written and oral communication skills. The scale is a 5-item Likert scale ranging from “Poor” to “Excellent”. Supervisors may also provide qualitative comments. All reports took place during the 2013 year over three semesters – spring, summer, and fall. 68 students were evaluated during this time period.

Findings

Findings from the quantitative internship reports were extremely positive. 96% of supervisors rated interns as having above average or excellent speaking and writing skills. No ratings of below average or poor were given. All supervisors (100%) rated interns at an excellent rating for competence and quality of effort. Less than 10% of supervisors provided qualitative feedback, and all feedback was very minimal and positive, generally commenting on what a pleasure the student was to have in the office.

How did you use findings for improvement?

Given the excellent ratings received by our students, we will look to design a more targeted and focused internship report that will give us more exact feedback on our students’ performance (such as specific areas of weakness and not such a broad overview) so that we may begin to address those areas of weakness in classes. Additionally, we will also require a pre- and post-report from supervisors, so we may determine how the students’ performance improved over the course of the internship.

Assessment Method 2: Student Internship Report

Assessment Method Description

Students are required to complete a report at the end of their internship. The report requires six components; a) review of internship activities, b) critical assessment of internship experience, c) critical assessment of preparation, d) analysis of the value of internship relative to career goals, e) suggestions for improvement, and f) work samples. Again, these reports were turned in by 68 students during the 2013 year over three semesters – spring, summer, and fall.

Findings

Comments from students were primarily positive, noting the internships were a good experience and they were prepared for the work required for their internship based on the required coursework they had completed. They noted the class projects had prepared them to work in a team-based environment, and had given them the skills necessary to be able to collaborate well with others. One student noted, “Because I had worked directly with clients through class, jumping into an internship where I work with clients on a daily basis was not a big deal. I was not nervous about interacting with clients, making presentations or asking questions, which proved to be a huge advantage when I began my internship.” Students expressed a desire to start the internship process earlier in their
academic career so they may have the opportunity to gain more experience. Students also noted they sometimes felt behind with respect to the use of industry-specific tools, and felt they had a steep learning curve. Similarly, students noted a familiarity with Adobe programs should be a requirement prior to the internship. Students also noted they would have liked the opportunity to be able to leave Auburn and go to a bigger city (Atlanta, Nashville, Dallas, Washington, D.C.) to intern, but credit hour requirements often made that impossible. They felt the internship opportunities in Auburn were very limited.

How did you use findings for improvement?

Since the findings were primarily positive, continuing to incorporate client-based project in to classes to allow students the experience of working with clients under the supervision of faculty will remain our primary focus. Examining how to incorporate Adobe elements as well as industry specific tools into courses prior to the internship requirement will also be considered.

Additional Comments

None.

Assessment Method 3: Survey of public relations students
Assessment Method Description

We administered a survey to junior and senior public relations majors over the course of the 2013 calendar year (spring and fall semesters). 136 students participated in the survey. Responses to survey questions were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” Survey questions included items such as “I developed writing skills”, “I developed collaboration skills”, “I learned to exercise initiative”, “I learned to strategize”, and “I learned to analyze situations for myself.”

Findings

Findings from the survey were mixed. 55% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they learned collaborative skills, 60% strongly agreed or agreed that they learned to exercise initiative, 62% strongly agreed or agreed they learned to organize, and 63% strongly agreed or agreed they learned to strategize. However, with respect to learning problem solving skills, learning how to manage their time, learning how to express criticism, and learning how to analyze situations on their own, less than 25% of respondents agreed that they learned these skills.

How did you use findings for improvement?

Going forward, we will continue to build on the positive responses of collaboration, initiative, organization and strategy by continuing to emphasize those skills in client-based courses and class projects. We will examine opportunities to further enhance opportunities to incorporate the other skill sets, such as more independent case study
analysis in Case Studies in Public Relations, setting forth more clear timelines and deadlines for projects in Survey Research Methods, Public Relations Campaigns and Style and Design so students may learn to manage their time more effectively, and creating discussion opportunities in Foundations of Public Relations and Case Studies in Public Relations which foster critical analysis and will allow students to express criticism of past situations in public relations.

**Additional Comments**

None.