PERCEPTIONS OF UTILITY AND IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC
RELATIONS EDUCATION AMONG EDUCATORS AND PRACTITIONERS

by

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(Under the Direction of Ruthann Weaver Lariscy)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of both the utility and
importance of international public relations education in practice among public relations
educators and public relations practitioners. There has been an increased interest in scholarly
research in international public relations and an effort to incorporate more international
components into public relations programs at universities in the United States. There have been
several quantitative studies exploring various areas of public relations education, but there has
not been a depth exploration of thoughts and attitudes.

This qualitative study explored the unprompted ideas and suggestions experts in
international PR make of international public relations education. Through 21 depth interviews,
the study assessed practitioners’ and educators’ perceptions of current international public
relations education and how this type of education can contribute to the effectiveness of future
practitioners. This study explores the link between education and its contribution to the practice.

INDEX WORDS: international public relations, public relations education, public relations
curriculum, qualitative research in public relations
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my father, Dr. Kriton K. Hatzios (1949-2003), who was professor of plant pathology and weed science and served as Associate Dean in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech until his death in February 2003. He was the biggest supporter of higher education I knew, and he had always encouraged me to get my master’s degree before I had even finished my bachelor’s degree. An immigrant who came to this country in pursuit of a better life through higher education, and who earned two graduate degrees and eventually served as an administrator and advisor to many faculty, staff, and students, he has always been an inspiration in my life to excel in my educational pursuits. Thank you, Dad, for always believing in me and for saying, “You can do it.”
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In the seminal text, *The Global Public Relations Handbook*, edited by Sriramesh and Vercic (2003), Sriramesh wrote in the introduction, “I believe that in the new millennium, *every* public relations professional must have a multicultural and global perspective in order to be effective, and such an outlook should not be considered the domain only of *international public relations specialists* anymore” (p. xxv).

Knowledge and experience in international affairs is becoming increasingly significant to the practice of public relations. Public relations practitioners will have to work with clients or colleagues in countries other than their own, create campaign materials that may have to be translated into multiple languages and may have to travel to various countries to conduct public relations work. As such, public relations practitioners will have to practice public relations on a global scale; they will have to practice international public relations. How will students who are entering the public relations workforce face these challenges? What type of international educational preparation should students receive in the public relations curricula to operate in a multicultural environment? This study will seek to explore the answers to these questions.
Defining “international public relations”

A variety of definitions and phrases have been used to define or substitute for the term international public relations. It has been called “intercultural public relations” (Taylor, 2001; Sha, 2006); “public diplomacy” (Grunig, 1993); “global public relations” (Taylor, 2000; Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003) and “multicultural public relations” (Banks, 2000). In some cases, the terms are used interchangeably, while in other studies they are used more distinctively. Sha (2006) defined intercultural public relations from a theoretical perspective as representing “an attempt to explain and account for the influence of cultural identity on the public relations behaviors of organizations and their publics” (p. 46). Taylor (2001) used two terms synonymously: “It is important to remember that international public relations is always intercultural public relations” (p. 75).

Hugh Culbertson (1996) explained the difference between comparative public relations and international public relations. He argued, “Comparative public relations involves a search for both similarities and differences between the practice in one or more countries and that in other venues. Its primary purpose is to identify more or less universal problems that challenge many or all nations, and to search for generic principles that apply widely” (p. 2). Conversely, Culbertson (1996) defined international public relations as focusing on the “practice of public relations in an international or cross-cultural context. . . . it involves public relations practice in at least four different realms: international organizations; intergovernmental relations; transnational economic transactions; and interactions among citizens of different nations” (p. 2).
John Reed wrote one of the most succinct definitions of international public relations: “the profession of organized ethical persuasion. . .you do it someplace else. Someplace else means you have to cross a linguistic, cultural, geographic or historical boundary to try to persuade audiences who are different from yourself” (“An International Sensibility,” 1999, p. 31).

Defining public relations in other languages

It is important to note here that the term public relations also has varying definitions when translated into other languages. Vercic, van Ruler, Butschi, and Flodin (2001) conducted a Delphi study of 25 European countries to add to the European Public Relations Body of Knowledge. In the study, they asked the respondents from each country (who were either public relations practitioners or public relations educators in those countries) how they would define public relations. They found that the translation of the English term public relations meant different things in different languages, and that the meaning was often significantly different from the English meaning. According to the results of the Delphi study, there were 22 different concepts associated with the translation of the term public relations, including “communication,” “relationships,” “mutual understanding,” “mutually beneficial,” “informing people/society,” and “information,” (Vercic et al., 2001, p. 379).

Vercic et al. (2001) argued, “A global approach to the definition, dimensions and domain of public relations is needed because wherever one lives his home base is globalizing and for that reason ‘localized’ (even if U.S.-based) approaches to public relations are simply inadequate and out-of-synch with the times we live in,” (p. 377).
For the purposes of this study, the term “international public relations” will be used and its definition encompasses all of the elements in Hugh Culbertson’s definition interpreted from an English-language perspective. His definition states that international public relations is the “practice of public relations in an international or cross-cultural context. . . . it involves public relations practice in at least four different realms: international organizations; intergovernmental relations; transnational economic transactions; and interactions among citizens of different nations” (p. 2). This term seems to be the most understandable to describe public relations practiced abroad and is used more popularly in the profession (e.g., International Public Relations Association (IPRA); International Public Relations Professional Interest Section of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA); and IPREX, the worldwide network of global and international public relations agencies).

An overview of literature on various aspects of international public relations

There has been an abundance of literature written about various aspects of international public relations. Some topics covered in the literature include international crises (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1998; Taylor, 2000); ethics and responsibility in international public relations (Kruckeberg, 1996; Roth, Hunt, Stavropoulos, & Babik, 1996; Grunig, 1993); evolution of Mexican public relations in the United States (Johnson, 2005); government as an important public (Taylor & Kent, 1999); campaigns (Curtin & Gaither, 2006; Zhang & Cameron, 2003) and “third gatekeeping” where practitioners in Korea screen newspaper content before it goes to press (Lee & Berkowitz, 2004).

There have also been several books written on the subject, including: Culbertson and Chen’s (1996) *International Public Relations: A Comparative Analysis*, Sriramesh

There has also been a growth in recent years of scholarly articles published in academic journals. Juan-Carlos Molläda and Alexander Laskin conducted a study for the Institute for Public Relations at the University of Florida in which they did an extensive content analysis of academic and trade publications in public relations, a few other international-oriented publications, and major academic books written about international public relations from 1990 to 2005. They analyzed a total of 236 academic journal articles, 244 trade articles, and 169 book chapters. They found that most of the research was quantitative in nature, and there has been a surge in the number of books published and academic journal publications published in the first few years of the 21st century, from 2000 to 2005 (Molläda & Laskin, 2005).

The literature is rich and varied, and each highlights important considerations for practicing international public relations. Beyond merely serving as a list of “do’s” and “don’ts,” the authors stress a deeper sophistication and understanding of the principles of
public relations is needed to effectively apply strategic management in an international context.

The importance and utility of international public relations education

“‘It is important that practitioners demonstrate in-depth awareness of the politics of ethnicity and religion, and of the cultural dichotomies of the major countries with which U.S. public relations firms do business,’” wrote Pratt and Ogbondah in 1996 (p. 386). Now, ten years later, this statement is as significant as ever.

“If members of an organizational public identify with a certain cultural group, they may communicate differently from the manner in which the organization communicates. Consequently, public relations practitioners will need intercultural communication competencies,” (Sha, 2006, p. 61).

The new crop of international public relations practitioners must be proficient in various global trends and issues to be able to effectively practice their profession and communicate with a variety of diverse publics. Several scholars strongly support the inclusion of international public relations education at the university level (Taylor, 2001; Freitag, 2002; Pratt & Ogbondah, 1996; Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003).

The Commission on Public Relations Education published a report in 1999 determining guidelines and offering its recommendations for public relations education in the 21st century. The Commission’s recommendations were guided by 12 assumptions, one of which was, “students must be prepared to operate in a multicultural environment” (section 5, p. 12). The Commission offered recommendations for curricula at both undergraduate and graduate levels. In the recommendations for undergraduate education (section 7), the Commission listed a mastery of knowledge in multicultural and global
issues (p. 17), competency and fluency in a second language, and applying cross-cultural and cross-gender sensitivity (p. 17). The Commission makes some similar recommendations for graduate education in public relations in section 8, advocating mastery in various content areas including behavioral sciences, in which students should be exposed to cultural anthropology, global trends, evolving global codes of conduct, and knowledge of local, state, national and international political systems (p. 22).

Many scholars have gone a step further and prescribed specific guidelines for incorporating international public relations into the curricula at U.S. colleges and universities with programs in public relations. Maureen Taylor (2001) outlined ways that communication departments can develop their own courses or include international public relations topics in already existing courses. First, public relations departments can design a separate course on international public relations. Second, professors can incorporate assignments that address international issues in existing public relations courses (e.g., in the campaigns or writing courses). Her third suggestion is building international learning communities where students can work on case studies together with students in other countries through an online platform.

Cornelius Pratt and C.W. Ogbondah listed several goals for international public relations courses (p. 391):

- Introduce students to the history and development of public relations in other cultures
- Acquaint students with the practice and function of public relations abroad, emphasizing differences between U.S. and non-U.S. practices
Describe the internal and external dynamics of multinational corporations as well as the problems and difficulties of U.S. corporate public relations abroad.

Although strong support for international public relations education exists, there is some question as to the extent of preparation of students who wish to practice international public relations. Gibson (2002) argued that a major problem for most entry-level public relations practitioners practicing Hispanic public relations is that they do not have sufficient knowledge of and skills in the field. “No matter how good their education and professional preparation, it is impossible to learn everything needed for success in public relations practice in school” (p. 79). He suggested that these new practitioners seek mentors to fill these gaps. “Mentoring is very beneficial for young communication professionals” (p. 79).

In connection with the last Commission Report, two articles were published addressing public relations education. The first addressed perceptions of public relations education (Stacks, Botan, & Turk, 1999) and the second addressed practitioner and educator outcomes (Neff, Walker, Smith & Creedon, 1999). The findings from the first article were used at the National Communication Association’s 1998 summer conference, where much of the discussion for creating the 1999 Commission Report originated. The researchers found that educators and practitioners shared similar opinions as to the skills, knowledge and concepts being taught in public relations programs (Stacks et al., 1999). The second article describes findings from a survey conducted during the 1998 summer conference. The researchers measured entry-level and advanced-level outcomes of practitioners. Among the desired outcomes listed for the entry-level practitioners, or recent graduates, was an understanding of “global/multicultural trends, issues and ethics”
(Neff et al., 1999, p. 31). The researchers also found that for advanced-level practitioners (students coming out of graduate programs and/or practitioners who have refined their skills and knowledge through continuing education) “a global perspective and the ability to speak a language other than English were among the lowest rated found outcomes” (p. 39). In other words, a global perspective and speaking a language other than English were two of the most highly recommended skills for advanced-level practitioners (according to practitioners and educators surveyed in the study), but were the least found in students who had completed graduate education in public relations.

Verbiest (1998) conducted a survey of public relations practitioners and their opinions about an international, or as he called it, worldwide public relations curriculum, and what practitioners thought students should learn before joining the workforce. He also asked them about their own preparation for international practice. His sample was comprised of 92 practitioners who were members of the international public relations interest group of PRSA. He found that “80 percent of the respondents said that they learned about international public relations through their own experience working with operations outside their native country” (Verbiest, 1998, p. 72). Although they could list several areas from which they gained their worldwide public relations training (e.g., independent reading, as well as an organizational seminar and an undergraduate course they had in college), the majority of their international training was learned independently of a formal curriculum (Verbiest, 1998). However, when asked which topics they thought were most important for practitioners to know, the respondents listed media, politics, economics and history as the top four topics (Verbiest, 1998).
Freitag (2002) conducted a study of 424 PR practitioners who were members of PRSA and asked them a host of questions about their international training and education, including (1) if they took any college-level international courses (e.g., cross-cultural communication, non-U.S. history, non-U.S. geography), (2) if they took any foreign language classes in college, (3) how long they have traveled outside of the United States, (4) how they perceived international courses contributing to their success in international assignments, and (5) the main countries they visited during international assignments. He found that those who had traveled internationally and taken international courses in college were more likely to seek international assignments, and the more preparation they had, the more perceived satisfaction and success they reported in completing their international assignments (Freitag, 2002).

Although formal education in international public relations is certainly not the only way for young PR professionals to learn about the field, there is strong scholarly support advocating its importance. “Offering college-level courses in international public relations is one of the best avenues for preparing public relations staffs for global business challenges” (Pratt & Ogbondah, 1996, p. 387). However, there is a dire need for more courses in international public relations and a need to integrate international topics into existing PR courses to help students become more viable and attain a comprehensive public relations education (Freitag, 2002; Nally, 1991; Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003; Taylor, 2001). These scholars also underscore the importance of having well-qualified teachers to teach courses in international public relations.

It has been suggested that qualified public relations practitioners with ample international experience offer to teach seminars on the topic (The Commission on Public
Relations Education, 1999; Freitag, 2002). Foreign exchange programs and internships at
an international company in the United States or abroad can also help students learn some
of the principles of international public relations and see the practice firsthand.

Undergraduate students at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte can now
complete a three-layer program in international public relations, which includes a four-
week intensive summer seminar in international public relations in London (Freitag,
2005). International public relations courses are not limited to programs at American
universities, however. Students from universities in Great Britain, the Netherlands, and
Sweden may participate in student exchanges with UNC-Charlotte (Freitag, 2005).

Public relations education has also expanded in Spain, with ten public universities and
nine private universities offering undergraduate degree programs in advertising/public
relations (Tilson & Pérez, 2003). Some of the Spanish universities host visiting scholars
from the United States and offer tracks in international public relations.

Many scholars stress the importance for students to understand the legal, political
and economic systems of other countries; the media systems in other countries; and the
ethics used in practicing public relations abroad (Freitag, 2003; Sriramesh & Vercic,
2003; Taylor, 2001; Pratt & Ogbonah, 1996; Commission on Public Relations
Education, 1999).

This emphasis on an international understanding is further underscored by the
results of a geographic literacy study. A recent study found that six in ten young
Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 cannot find Iraq on a map (National
Geographic Society, 2006a). The National Geographic-Roper Public Affairs 2006
Geographic Literacy Study, conducted in December 2005 and January 2006, polled 510
respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 in the continental United States. The study also found that the respondents’ domestic geography was weak. One-third of the respondents were unable to locate the state of Louisiana on a map of the United States, and 48 percent of them could not find the state of Mississippi (National Geographic Society, 2006a).

The study also found that young Americans have a weak understanding of languages in the world. Three-quarters of the respondents, or 74 percent, “believe English is the most commonly spoken native language in the world, rather than Mandarin Chinese” (National Geographic Society, 2006b). Also, six in ten young Americans, or 62 percent, reported that they cannot speak a second language fluently (National Geographic Society, 2006b).

Young Americans’ limited geographic knowledge is one major obstacle that educators will have to face at the university level as American students arrive unprepared and unaware of the importance of geography—a basic skill that will be increasingly essential for any public relations practitioner. John Fahey, National Geographic Society president and CEO, asserted the value of geography:

Geographic illiteracy impacts our economic well-being, our relationships with other nations and the environment, and isolates us from our world. Geography is what helps us make sense of our world by showing the connections between people and places. Without geography, our young people are not ready to face the challenges of the increasingly interconnected and competitive world of the 21st century (National Geographic Society, 2006a).

According to the Commission report on public relations education, students will need to know how to operate in a multicultural environment. How is this achieved? One useful starting point is by introducing them to general issues that are found in a multicultural environment. Five important content areas of practicing international
public relations (language, culture, and customs; international public relations as public diplomacy; media systems; ethics; and crisis) will be discussed in the following sections.

**Language, Culture and Customs**

Zaharna (2000) offered an important challenge for many practitioners:

“American practitioners may be particularly vulnerable to mistaking what are uniquely American notions of public relations as ‘PR universals’” (p. 91). She is not alone in her assessment; Taylor and Kent (1999) argued that Western theories of practicing public relations, although they may be dominant, may not be the best way to conduct public relations in international contexts. Especially when counseling top management about public relations practices abroad, practitioners should be aware that models used in the United States may not be as effective in other countries where local practices are preferred and should be used (Grunig, J., Grunig, L., Sriramesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995).

Practitioners must also be aware that their customs and habits may not be understandable or appreciated when interacting with colleagues abroad and working with journalists, politicians, and other representatives in other countries. They must take the time to prepare and learn about the customs and business operations in countries in which they will practice. This is especially true for media systems in other countries (this will be discussed in greater detail later).

One key area in which a practitioner must be intimately familiar is the individual customs and languages(s) of the country or countries in which he or she is working.

“One must think in the language in which one intends to communicate,” noted Dirk Gibson (2002, p. 76), in his analysis of Hispanic public relations in the United States. He advised that direct translation, or translating an English concept word for word in
Spanish, does not always work as the translation may have a different meaning than the intended one.

Zaharna (2000) suggested that practitioners can use the cultural knowledge they gain from learning about other cultures to develop public relations campaigns unique to a specific culture or country. Learning about and incorporating local traditions and symbols is extremely valuable in crafting powerful persuasive messages, and can also assist with practitioners’ relations with their clients (Zaharna, 2000). In fact, learning about something as particular as the significance of a color can prove to be very meaningful in creating materials for a campaign. For example, Dempsey (1992) wrote that the color yellow “carries religious and mystical overtones in India, while in China, it represents both the Emperor and pornography! In America, it can evoke cowardice (a yellow streak) or faithfulness (a yellow ribbon)” (p. 23). As such, a public relations practitioner would be well advised to avoid using yellow folders for press kits in China.

Even in a very specific case, one cannot apply the same public relations strategies. In their case study of the World Health Organization’s smallpox eradication campaign during the 1960s and 1970s, Curtin and Gaither (2006) described various situations in which WHO workers had to adapt their vaccination procedures in different countries or even different regions of the same country. “The campaign could not simply assume a set of cultural beliefs, apply them to a country, and expect success” (p. 79). They explained that in southern India there was a Hindu goddess of smallpox, and when she was angered, she could inflict the disease to anyone (Curtin & Gaither, 2006). Other cultures, such as Nigeria, Benin and Togo, also associated the disease with a deity, and
campaign workers needed to understand these cultural practices in crafting and communicating vaccination messages.

**International public relations as diplomacy**

International public relations can serve many important functions. One of these functions is public diplomacy. Public relations scholar James Grunig (1993) argued that public diplomacy consists “essentially of the application of public relations to strategic relationships of organizations with international publics” (p. 143). Many foreign governments are looking to public relations practitioners to help them communicate their messages to their publics, including internal publics (citizens of the country) and publics of neighboring countries who are affected by a country’s policies (Grunig, 1993).

From the perspective of the American practitioner, international public relations as a means of public diplomacy does not only have to be practiced abroad. It can be practiced by practitioners on behalf of a foreign government in the United States. For example, public relations campaigns can be used as a method of public diplomacy to help restore or bolster a country’s image, such as the case of China (Zhang & Cameron, 2003). The United States media has important implications for international relations between the United States and China. During the last three decades of the 20th century, the researchers had found that the American media’s attitude toward China has traditionally been negative (Zhang & Cameron, 2003). So the Chinese government decided to launch an international public relations campaign in the United States between August 23rd and September 17, 2000 to help restore its image. The campaign consisted of a tour of Chinese culture in nine American cities; an interview with Chinese President Jiang Zemin on *60 Minutes*; and a touring performance show by the China Disabled People’s Arts
Performing Troupe (Zhang & Cameron, 2003). The campaign also consisted of some less visible tactics, including a meeting with President Zemin and presidents of some American media corporations; a meeting with U.S. President Bill Clinton, and concluded with a visit to Hawaii by the Chinese Navy’s Northern Sea Fleet.

Zhang and Cameron (2003) conducted a content analysis of articles in the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *New York Times*, during and following the campaign. They found that there was more frequent negative coverage than positive, but coverage in September and October was more positive than in August, showing that the campaign did produce some meaningful effects in producing more positive news coverage (Zhang & Cameron, 2003). They also found that coverage after October 2000 became negative again, to the same level as it had been before the campaign, showing that the campaign effects were short-lived (Zhang & Cameron, 2003). But nonetheless, the campaign is an example of how a foreign government can use international public relations as a means of public diplomacy to produce favorable relationships with external publics (the United States media) and the government (China).

Public diplomacy was also used, although to a lesser extent, when public relations practitioners conducted communication activities for Mexico in the United States. Johnson (2005) studied 940 Foreign Agent’s Registration Act (FARA) listings under Mexico from 1942 to 1991 to discover what types of public relations activities were being conducted and for what purposes. She found that practitioners conducted a variety of activities, such as producing and distributing magazines, newsletters, photo exhibits, videos, and short films. These public relations materials were created mainly to promote travel and tourism in Mexico, as well as real estate investment; and to encourage
consumers to purchase Mexican agricultural products and livestock; raw materials; and oil and minerals (Johnson, 2005). Practitioners also performed media relations and lobbying efforts. Throughout her study, she found that in the latter decades of the 20th century, Mexico portrayed a gradual appreciation for public relations by targeting a broader set of publics and directing more PR efforts to large cities in the United States (Johnson, 2005).

Interestingly, she found that most of the public relations efforts were aimed at making money for Mexico, not at restoring an image. And although they engaged in media relations activities, PR practitioners for the Mexican government did not attempt to decrease negative coverage about immigration and drugs after the 1940s, two large image problems for Mexico (Johnson, 2005).

**Media Systems**

Media systems of foreign countries play an important role when conducting international public relations. There are several factors that affect the handling of media systems. The main factor is whether the media are state-owned, meaning the government controls the information, or independent, meaning the media are private entities, independent from government ownership, and the owner controls the information that is disseminated. Many countries have both state-owned and independent media, while some countries only have state-owned media.

In their study of public relations practices in Malaysia, Taylor and Kent (1999) highlighted a power struggle related to media ownership between the government and citizens of developing countries. The media are state-owned in many countries, including Malaysia. And, unlike Western societies, where publics have a history of being activists
and challenging authority, few publics in Asian and developing nations engage in activism and ordinary citizens have little power to bring about change. As a result, citizens and public relations practitioners (in their PR campaigns) are reluctant to question or criticize the government and business.

A country’s political and economic stability also influence how media systems are operated. Tilson and Pérez (2003) reviewed the growth of the public relations profession in Spain, and found that as government reforms and democracy grew following the end of dictator Franco’s regime, personal freedoms and freedom of the press grew. State monopolies of television ended in the late 1980s, and since then several private national and regional television stations have been created (Tilson & Pérez, 2003). Also, the numbers of radio networks and newspapers grew enormously during this same period. Public relations also rapidly developed as a result of this growth of democracy and sweeping government reforms that led to increased public opinion and deregulation. The authors also noted that media relations and corporate communication (especially about identity and image) are two important public relations functions in Spain (Tilson & Pérez, 2003).

Taylor (2001) argued that “the level of media development and professionalism is one of the most important factors” to influence international public relations because “who owns and controls the media will ultimately influence the credibility of public relations messages” (p. 77). The way the news content is handled also influences the message. Ihator (2000) pointed out that “news, like any other product, is market-driven” and “in some societies, news and propaganda may not be differentiated” (p. 41).
Strenski (1985) underscored the importance of acknowledging and understanding the differences between media systems and media channels in foreign countries. He advised that practitioners work with reputable, ethical and professional public relations firms in a foreign country when practicing public relations. “If an unknowing public relations professional attempts to deal with the foreign media in the same manner he deals with the U.S. media, there is sure to be disaster” (Strenski, 1985, p. 28).

The gatekeeping function also plays an important role in conducting public relations in a foreign country. Korean newspapers use the concept of “third gatekeeping,” where Korean public relations practitioners pre-screen the first editions of almost all of Korea’s major daily newspapers before they are widely distributed to the public (Lee & Berkowtiz, 2004). This unique practice allows the practitioners to screen the news stories for accuracy and news value, make changes, and then the editors make the revisions. The authors found that this practice continues because of the relationships between Korean journalists and public relations practitioners (Lee & Berkowtiz, 2004). However, this practice may be deemed unethical by some American practitioners, because the Korean practitioners manipulate news content and may delete or substitute information if certain pieces may negatively impact the companies they represent (e.g., if a company is involved in a scandal, only the company’s initials are used instead of its full name).

Ihator (2000) also noted that the practice and style of newswriting may differ between countries. Journalists in the United States are taught to write to the point and to use inverted pyramid style. In other countries, the writing style may be more flowery,
where journalists use more metaphors, long sentences, vague ideas and exaggerations to create a certain effect (Ihator, 2000).

**Ethics**

Ethics is a major concern in the field of international public relations (see, e.g., Kruckeberg, 1996; Roth et al., 1996; Grunig, 1993; Taylor, 2001; Freitag, 2002). It is difficult to devise a universal code of ethics for practicing public relations that applies to all countries. Taylor (2001) discussed some of the topics of ethics the international public relations practitioner may face: appropriateness of bribery; paying for story placement; working in a highly stratified society that privileges one group over another; patronage; and nepotism.

In their review of relevant literature, Roth et al. (1996) found that many of the authors had established the United States as a model for practitioners to use in applying ethics codes. The authors disagreed with this notion and argued that trying to impose American standards of ethics on practitioners from other countries or from American practitioners working abroad would be problematic. “U.S. standards are highly specific and legalistic and leave little room for cultural variation” (Roth et al., 1996, p. 154). The two most common public relations codes of ethics in the United States are the International Association of Business Communicators Code of Ethics and the Code for Professional Standards for the Practice of Public Relations. However, Roth et al. concluded that they believe it is possible to develop a guideline for universal ethical standards that uses “authority” instead of “enforcement” as a foundation. They argued that while the word “code” implies enforcement, the codes are really models for behavior (Roth et al., 1996). To move toward international cooperation, they suggested that the
IABC Code of Ethics and PRSA Code incorporate mutually agreed upon practices developed from the standpoint of practitioners conducting public relations abroad into their documents.

**Crisis**

Practitioners in different countries approach a crisis and the handling of a crisis differently than practitioners in the United States. For one thing, many international practitioners do not have crisis plans. According to Roth et al. (1996), the Japanese lack crisis plans because they are conditioned to ask for forgiveness and are non-aggressive. González-Herrero and Pratt (1998) studied the crisis-response strategies of marketing and communication professionals in tourism organizations in the United States and in Spain. They found that while organizations in the United States had advanced, well-developed crisis response strategies, Spanish organizations did not place as much emphasis on having proactive, well-developed crisis plans. In fact, when they asked organizations, “Does your organization have a written crisis plan?”, 78 percent of the American organizations said yes, while only 29 percent of Spanish organizations said yes (González-Herrero & Pratt, 1998, p. 93).

Perhaps a more prominent example is the Coca-Cola scare in Europe in the summer of 1999. On June 14, 1999, reports surfaced that school children in Belgium became ill after drinking Coca-Cola soft drinks, which led to the Belgian government recalling all Coca-Cola products from the country. The next day, Spain and France (which border Belgium), accused Coca-Cola of selling tainted products and also recalled the soft drink. Coca-Cola, in a terribly crafted public relations response, did not accept
any responsibility for the incident and waited nine days before the CEO acknowledged the problem (Taylor, 2000).

In the end, more than 200 people became ill from the tainted Coca-Cola products; 2.5 million bottles were recalled; Belgium, Spain and France had also boycotted other Coca-Cola products such as Fanta and Nestea; and the company spent millions of dollars in recovery efforts.

However, despite its delay, Coca-Cola did eventually instigate some wise crisis response strategies. According to Echikson (1999), the company set up a “war room” in Brussels to handle the crisis. Marketing managers, public relations consultants, distribution experts and others met every day at 9 a.m. to streamline decision-making. This was a key first step in crisis response, according to Caywood and Stocker (1993), authors of *The Ultimate Crisis Plan*. According to the plan, one of the first steps is to assemble a crisis team and furnish a crisis room where the team can meet and make decisions.

All of these content areas—language culture and customs; public diplomacy; media systems; ethics; and crisis—are important issues that should be covered in international public relations courses. They would certainly satisfy the recommendations made by the Commission report for exposure to “multicultural and global issues” and “global codes of conduct.”

**Theoretical perspective**

**Role Theory**

Role theory is a useful theoretical perspective from which to study international public relations. In their 1986 article on advancement for public relations role models,
Broom and Dozier (1986) defined two main roles for public relations practitioners: *communication manager* and *communication technician*.

The *communication manager* is the authority on public relations problems and solutions, and is heavily involved in problem solving and decision-making processes for the public relations unit. The *communication technician* is more involved in production activities, such as writing press releases and other materials, and does not have a role in the decision-making process. They found that managers were generally more satisfied with their jobs than technicians, and that professional growth in public relations was a function of the role the practitioner had in the organization (Broom & Dozier, 1986).

White and Dozier (1992) reported that public relations practitioners are too often stuck in the *technician* role and are not engaged enough in the environmental scanning, research or information processing activities, which can elevate their status to the *manager* role. White and Dozier (1992) also stressed the importance of both internal and external environmental scanning to the *manager* role.

The environmental scanning function, also called boundary spanning, is performed by individuals called *boundary spanners* (White & Dozier, 1992). Boundary spanners monitor their internal and external environments for information important to their organization and relay it to decision makers in the dominant coalition (White & Dozier, 1992). The information that is gathered is useful for averting problems or crises, or for dealing with current issues. The more abstract the problems, the higher the level of strategic decision-making that is needed (White & Dozier, 1992). Those practitioners in the manager role would be more involved in dealing with these complex problems and would be contributing to the decision-making process. Too often practitioners are stuck
in the technician role and are not engaged enough in the critical boundary scanning or research functions, which can help to elevate their status, the authors say. “Yet the role of information gatherer and processor is key to the communication manager’s participation in management decision making” (White & Dozier, 1992, p. 103).

Much of the literature in support of international public relations education is grounded in role theory (Vercic et al., 2001; Nally, 1991; Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999; Freitag, 2002). Knowledge of international public relations practices is essential for the public relations practitioner to be able to execute the boundary scanning function and to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with publics.

Vercic et al. (2001) aptly summarized it this way:

What distinguishes the public relations manager when he sits down at a table with other managers is that he brings to the table a special concern for broader societal issues and approaches to any problem with a concern for implications of organizational behavior towards and in the public sphere (p. 382).

Nally (1991) underscored a need for management skills to be added to the public relations curricula. The Commission Report (1999) also emphasized this vision for future PR professionals in section 3, stating: “In the future, public relations professionals will not only be skilled communicators but leaders who will help their organizations build and maintain relationships with strategic publics. They will fulfill dual roles of managing communication and counseling top management” (p. 11).
Excellence Theory

The four models developed by Grunig and Hunt—the press agentry model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetrical model and the two-way symmetrical model—have become staples of public relations theory. In their paper revisiting the four models, James and Larissa Grunig assert that the two-way symmetrical model should serve as the normative model for public relations, that it “describes how excellent public relations should be practiced” (Grunig, J & Grunig, L., 1990, p. 8). They acknowledged that not all organizations practice this model and that they can use elements of different models in different situations.

Grunig and Grunig (1990) also noted that public relations departments have more “potential” if they are led by a practitioner in the manager role rather than the technician role, and even more so if the practitioners in the department have training and knowledge of the two-way symmetrical model. This model is so highly regarded as being “excellent” because of its utilization of research to foster an environment of understanding and communication; understanding—rather than propaganda, disseminating information, or persuasion—is the primary objective.

Grunig (1992) reviewed many studies of characteristics of excellent organizations and identified 12 characteristics that contributed to the organizations’ “excellence.” He then discussed the implications for public relations for each of these attributes. Three of these attributes—symmetrical communication systems, strong participative cultures, strategic planning—are three areas in which public relations can directly enhance organizational excellence. Through listening and dialogue with key internal and external publics, fostering an organizational culture in which open and democratic communication
is valued, and using strategies and tactics based on research to guide decision-making, PR practitioners can use excellence theory in practicing effective public relations.

“Excellent organizations can develop most easily in a societal culture that values collaboration. . . .Public relations is the organizational function that could bring such a [participative] culture into the organization, or that could export a participative organizational culture to the broader society,” wrote James Grunig in his chapter on excellence in management (Grunig, J., 1992, p. 248). He asserts that symmetrical communication, a hallmark of the two-way symmetrical model, is an essential component of an excellent organization. This communication takes place through “dialogue, negotiation, listening, and conflict management rather than through persuasion, manipulation, and the giving of orders” (Grunig, J. 1992, p. 231). Public relations practitioners, through symmetrical communication, contribute to the overall effectiveness of the organization.

Indeed, effective public relations can make valuable contributions to organizations. Hon (1997) conducted a qualitative study through depth interviews where she explored effectiveness in public relations and the value that effective public relations brings to organizations and clients. She conducted 42 interviews, comprised of 32 interviews with practitioners (working in corporate, nonprofit, government, associations, and PR agencies) and an additional 10 interviews with CEOs or the top managers outside of the PR department. Hon (1997) found that effective public relations can help organizations to make money and save money and defuse opponents.

To be effective and successful, organizations must establish mutually beneficial relationships with their publics on whom they ultimately depend. Public relations
practitioners usually serve in this role of building relationships with target publics. The relationships, however, become more complex the more publics there are and the more diverse the audience. To be successful in building and maintaining relationships with publics in an international context, practitioners must understand the intercultural aspects of practicing public relations in other countries. This can be accomplished through the growth and development of international public relations courses in public relations programs at universities in the United States.

**Justification for study**

In determining guidelines for sample curriculum configurations for undergraduate public relations education, the Commission on Public Relations Education (1999) advocated “A strong traditional liberal arts and social science education is a necessary foundation for public relations education. It also is requisite that a multicultural and global perspective pervades the curriculum, and that public relations be taught within the framework of ethical issues and behavior” (section 7, p. 17).

The Commission listed nine topics deemed “essential to a strong undergraduate education in public relations” (p. 18), and three of these topics specifically reference international public relations. A recommendation under theory, origin, principles and professional practice of public relations is “specializing in an area of public relations, and “international public relations” is listed as one such specialization. A second topic is supervised work experience in public relations; the Commission believes that students should “have the opportunity to apply the skills and principles they learn to the professional arena” (p. 19). This can apply to internships abroad or international-based internships for students interested in international public relations. Finally, a third topic
relevant to international public relations is directed electives. Listed among the many possible electives are “cultural anthropology” and “international business and communication” (p. 19). At the graduate level, a seminar in global public relations is listed among several courses in a sample master’s program content outline (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999).

Sriramesh (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003) brings up an important point:

It is not only the “international public relations professional” who needs to be aware of the differences in cultures, political philosophies, and economic systems, but this knowledge needs to be a part of the repertoire of every public relations professional. In other words, every public relations professional needs to become a multicultural communicator in an ever globalizing world. Therefore, it is pertinent to ask: Is the current public relations education system adequately equipped to train students to become effective multicultural public relations professionals? (p. 505).

This study is designed to provide insight and some answers to this question. Specifically, this study asks questions of practitioners and educators about several important elements of education and their relationship to professional practices including: (1) the utility and importance of international courses in public relations, communication and other subject areas (such as geography, foreign language, politics and economics); (2) the contribution of international public relations education to the effectiveness of practitioners’ job performance; (3) whether public relations practitioners and educators agree with the scholars’ assessments that international public relations education helps them to become more advanced and effective in their profession; (4) recommendations
of those who practice and teach international public relations to students to better prepare them for entering the international public relations workforce; (5) constraints and opportunities that exist for increasing international public relations education.

The results of this study may help educators and practitioners understand how each thinks about the utility and importance of international public relations education. Further, this research will contribute to the body of knowledge of a growing field in the study of public relations.
CHAPTER II

METHODS

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of both the utility and importance of international public relations education in practice among public relations educators and public relations practitioners. There has been an increased interest in scholarly research in international public relations and an effort to incorporate more international components to the public relations programs at universities in the United States. As discussed in Chapter 1, there have been quantitative studies exploring various areas of public relations education, such as perceptions of public relations education of practitioners and educators (Stacks et al., 1999); outcome profiles for entry-level practitioners, advanced-level practitioners and educators (Neff et al., 1999); and American PR practitioners’ perceptions of what is important about international public relations and recommendations for a worldwide PR curriculum (Verbiest, 1998).

Creedon and Al-Khaja (2005) advocated an increase in cultural competency in public relations education in the United States. In building their case supporting the inclusion of world history and culture into a public relations curriculum, the authors designed a study seeking to partially examine the role of public relations in creating cultural understanding and an awareness of different social systems among students in journalism and mass communication programs in the United States. The researchers conducted a survey of programs accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass
Communication (ACEJMC) to assess whether a history course (and what type of history course) was required for journalism and mass communication majors. Out of the 70 programs that participated in the study, 56 of those required a history course, though the requirements varied from school to school (Creedon & Al-Khaja, 2005).

However, beyond such quantitative assessments, what is missing from the literature is a depth exploration of thoughts and attitudes that can best be achieved through qualitative research. No research has previously explored in a non-structured manner the unprompted ideas and suggestions experts in international PR make. This study does just that. Specifically, this study, through depth interviews, assesses practitioners’ and educators’ perceptions of current international public relations education and how this type of education can contribute to the effectiveness of future practitioners. This study will explore this link between education and its contribution to the practice and make recommendations for future direction in PR education.

**Origin of the study**

This study began as a way to explore the gaps or shortcomings in the current available literature on international public relations education, and there are several gaps. First, there is not an agreed-upon scholarly definition of *international public relations*, and just like the general term *public relations*, there are many different definitions, interpretations, uses, misuses and meanings. Second, there has not been much scholarly writing on the types of *roles* PR practitioners occupy in this specialization. Since the international field is such an important and growing field within public relations, are there many practitioners serving in the *manager* role advising the top management? Do some of the practitioners practicing international PR also fit in the *technician* role? Are
they engaging in boundary spanning, a critical function needed to help counsel the
dominant coalition and assist in strategic decision-making?

Third, there has not been much investigation into the background of the educators
who **teach** international courses in the PR curriculum, or the educational preparation of
those who **practice** it. Does having a background in international coursework, or
especially in international public relations, add value to the practitioner’s job
performance? How does it factor into his or her careers? What is the expertise or
background in international public relations of the educators who are teaching
international PR classes?

Fourth, there has not been much research as to how students’ exposure to
international courses, specifically those in a public relations curriculum, can help to make
them more effective as future practitioners. How important do both educators and
practitioners think international courses are for a PR curriculum? What do students with
international exposure and awareness of cultural differences in conducting public
relations bring to the table? Freitag (2002) investigated the link between assessing
practitioners’ preparation for international assignments and their perceived success and
satisfaction of those international assignments. He also looked at the extent of
international training and education of a sample of PR practitioners in the United States.
Although Verbiest (1998) was able to measure practitioners’ opinions of the importance
of international courses in a PR curriculum, he did not ask any opinions of educators,
however. In his recommendations for future research, he advised that current educators
be asked about how certain content areas, such as politics, history and geography can be
incorporated into public relations courses.
Fifth, although there has been some quantitative research concerning pedagogy and public relations and curricular guidelines (especially following the 1999 Commission Report), there has not been any qualitative research asking both practitioners and educators if there is something that could help to better prepare students who are entering the public relations workforce. What do educators and practitioners recommend for students who want to work in international public relations? Are there other elements that can be added to the curriculum? As Sriramesh asked: “Is the current public relations education system adequately equipped to train students to become effective multicultural public relations professionals?” (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003, p. 505).

Sixth, there has not been much research investigating the existing constraints and opportunities for increasing the international component in the public relations curriculum in universities in the United States. Maureen Taylor (2001) offered three ways to incorporate cultural and international topics into public relations programs, but she does not address possible constraints that some programs may face, limiting their options for internationalizing their curricula. Which schools do offer an international course as part of the PR sequence? Why do some universities offer an international course and some do not? How can PR professionals help broaden international PR programs at universities?

This study, loosely modeled after Dr. Alan Freitag's research on this topic ("Ascending Cultural Competence Potential: An Assessment and Profile of U.S. Public Relations Practitioners' Preparation for International Assignments" in 2002 in the Journal of Public Relations Research (14(3), pp. 207-227)), is designed to at least partially fill these gaps. Rather than relying on a quantitative survey, this study utilizes a different
methodological approach because it seeks insights rather than descriptive numbers. It was determined that depth interviews are more appropriate for this study because of the richness of open-ended data that can be obtained and the deeper level of detail that could be examined in a qualitative study. Using interviews, the researcher also would be able to probe the perceptions about the current state of international PR education.

“The interview...is among the most basic and fundamental of methods, and one which, if executed well, brings us arguably closer than many other methods to an intimate understanding of people and their social worlds,” commented sociology researcher Joseph Hermanowicz (2002, p. 480). This understanding is accomplished through the search for meaning. “The search for meaning is the major reason to use the interview method and qualitative methods generally. They are best able to capture fine-grained levels of significance” (Hermanowicz, 2002, p. 484).

The research questions, sample, procedures and research instrument are discussed in the following sections.

**Research Questions**

These Research Questions are derived from the existing gaps discussed previously in the literature.

RQ1: How do public relations practitioners and public relations educators define “international public relations”?

RQ2: What types of roles describe the practitioners working in international PR?

RQ3: How has education factored into the careers of the practitioners and educators?
RQ4: How important do educators and practitioners think that international courses are for public relations students?

RQ4a: To what extent do practitioners and educators think international courses contribute to the effectiveness of the PR practitioner's job performance?

RQ5: What do people who practice and teach international public relations recommend to students to better prepare them for entering the international public relations workforce?

RQ6: What constraints and opportunities exist for increasing international public relations education in the public relations sequence within communication programs in colleges or universities in the United States?

Sample

The sample is comprised of public relations educators and practitioners. The names of practitioners were taken from the membership directory of the International Section of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). A purposive sample of practitioners and educators was obtained from this list. Since this professional interest group is mainly comprised of practitioners, a purposive sample of educators was also obtained from the directory of members of the PRSA Educator’s Academy to supplement the second group of subjects. Care was taken to ensure that educators who were cross-listed in both directories were not counted twice. The universities from which the educators were affiliated were also correlated with the chart of “Where to Study Public Relations” from the PR-Education Web site to ensure that schools from each of the 4 regions were reflected in the initial pool. The schools listed among the 4 geographic regions in the United States reflect the 23 “premier” schools listed in Bill Baxter’s (1999)
booklet listing the top 100 college programs in public relations in the United States (Hallahan, date unknown).

An initial pool of 33 practitioners and 53 educators was created. The subjects were divided into three groups: public relations practitioners who practiced international PR or worked in some type of international context; public relations educators who taught an international course as part of the public relations curriculum at their respective universities; and public relations educators who did not teach an international course, and whose department or college did not currently offer an international course as part of the public relations sequence. Snowball sampling was also used to generate more names of practitioners and educators who were not already included in the membership directories.

The sample consists of 21 respondents: 9 practitioners and 12 educators. Of the 21, there are 13 females and 8 males. The group of educators is comprised of two types: six who teach an international course as part of the public relations curriculum at their respective schools, and six who do not teach an international course, and whose department or college does not currently offer an international course as part of the public relations sequence. The group of educators was separated into two categories to probe for insights into the reasons why some PR programs offer international courses and some do not.

Procedure

Overview

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board Human Subjects Office from the University of Georgia, subjects received a recruitment email from the researcher explaining the study and asking for their participation and to choose a day and time for
the interview. Once they responded to the initial email, they received a consent form and a written confirmation, via email, of the interview appointment. The participants were informed that the interviews would be tape-recorded but that their identity and responses would remain confidential.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was first conducted to test the instrument. Three practitioners and three educators were interviewed during the pilot study in the last three weeks in April. At the end of the interview, they were asked to provide feedback on the wording of the questions, if they felt that any questions were absent, and if they were confused by any question in the interview guide. In light of the suggestions, some minor modifications were made to the instrument. The pilot study interviews were conducted from April 10 until May 2, 2006.

Research Instrument Design

Interview Guide

Participants were first asked to introduce themselves and to describe what position they had in their organization or university and what courses they taught (if they were educators). The practitioners were asked an array of questions relating to their role in their organization, the relationship with top management, the PR department’s role in major policy decisions of the organization, and the role of the Internet and blogs.

The structure of the interviews for both practitioners and educators was based on the following questions:

- What is the subject’s educational background?
- What is the extent of the subject’s international experience?
How do public relations educators and public relations practitioners define “international public relations”?

How important do the subjects think international courses are to a PR curriculum?

How would the subjects rate the importance of certain international courses, such as geography, foreign language, international public relations, or intercultural communication?

How do they think these international courses relate to individual effectiveness?

Which universities come to mind when subjects are asked to name universities in the United States who offer an international course as part of the PR curriculum?

Is there a situation in which they did not feel prepared and if there was something that could have helped them?

What recommendations would they make to students who wanted to work in international public relations?

Additionally, educators who taught an international course were also asked to describe the course, the topics covered, and the assignments and textbooks used.

Educators who did not teach an international course (and whose department did not offer one) were asked why the department did not offer such a course, and if it is considering offering one in the future. Practitioners were asked if they have ever taught an international PR course at a university; they were also asked what the minimum requirements they’d be looking for if they were hiring a PR practitioner, and finally, what
suggestions they had as to how PR professionals could broaden international PR programs at universities.

All three interview guides are shown in Appendix A, B, and C.

Interview Procedure

Each interview was conducted over the telephone and tape recorded (ranging from 30 minutes to 67 minutes). After the participants consented, via email, to be interviewed over the telephone and that the conversations would be tape-recorded, they were called at their scheduled time. Each participant was reminded again about the purpose and description of the study and that their responses would be tape-recorded but would remain confidential. Following the six in the pilot study, 15 interviews were conducted between May 16 and June 22, 2006. Audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

One of the important principles in qualitative research methods addresses the question, “how does a researcher know when an adequate number of subjects have been interviewed?” The answer is the principle of redundancy. Simply put, this means one starts hearing the same answers repeatedly. The researcher is “no longer surprised by the participants’ actions or meanings,” which according to Lindlof and Taylor (2002, p. 224), is a test of redundancy, meaning the information gathered is sufficient to answer the research questions. Redundancy was achieved in that the respondents reported the same themes in their responses to many of the same questions. Participants within both groups (12 educators, and 9 practitioners) were reporting the same reasons, opinions and attitudes. For example, when asked the same question, “What recommendations would you make to students who would like to work in international public relations?” it
became apparent that the same basic response was emerging every time among the participants. For example, 20 out of 21 people said they would recommend for students to learn a foreign language really well if they wanted to work in international PR.

Among the subgroups, similar responses were heard as well. When educators who did not teach an international course were asked why their departments did not offer such a course in the PR curriculum, all six offered the same reasons. They said that they did not have enough faculty to teach another course, and that their students already had so many other courses they needed to complete. When practitioners were asked what minimum requirements they had for hiring entry-level practitioners in international PR, all nine listed knowledge of a foreign language, an internship and some international experience (either through travel, study abroad, or work experience) as their requirements. The examples illustrate that the same responses were given consistently every time to several questions, thus satisfying the redundancy requirement.

**Coding Procedure**

To help ensure confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym, which was used to replace the participant’s real name and initials in the transcript. The transcripts were then coded. To determine a coding structure, an “open coding” procedure was used, in which the first six to eight transcripts were read all the way through to look for suggested categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Passages of text that related to a general concept were assigned to categories that matched the research questions.

Six main categories were matched with six main colors that correlated to the six research questions: 1) definition (green); 2) roles of practitioners (pink); 3) educational
background of practitioners and educators (blue); 4) importance of international courses to students and contribution to effectiveness (yellow); 5) courses or other actions that can better prepare students (purple); and 6) barriers or opportunities that exist for expanding international PR curricula (orange). Lighter shades of purple were used to highlight subcategories in item #5 for recommendations practitioners and educators had for PR students, and requirements for a job in international PR. A lighter shade of orange was used to highlight a subcategory in item #6 for suggestions PR practitioners had as to how professionals in the field can help to broaden international PR programs at universities.

**Data Analysis**

Once the transcripts were coded by color, each of the colored passages of text was classified with the research question to which it corresponded. The researcher then searched for themes within the passages.

In order to check on the reliability of the researcher’s coding categories, a second coder was recruited to blindly review and categorize a sample of the researcher’s previously coded data. Given a description of the categories and basic instructions, the second coder replicated the researcher’s findings almost exactly. In fact, through one entire transcript, there was only one passage that was not identically coded between the researcher and the second coder. This procedure enhances greatly the confidence we can have in the findings of this study in that the intercoder reliability was excellent.

The one passage where there was not identical coding was in fact a passage that the researcher herself had difficulty discerning between two categories (the importance of education and recommendations for students). For example, the coder categorized a section in which the participant was affirming her belief that students should get the best
college education they can and supplement it with some work experience and/or study abroad (which she coded yellow, as she said she thought that passage related generally to the importance of education), while the researcher coded purple with yellow, as it could also be classified as a recommendation to help prepare students for international practice. This was the single instance of a blurring between two categories.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

RQ1: How do public relations practitioners and public relations educators define “international public relations”?

Both PR practitioners and educators had a broad range of definitions for international public relations. The most common definition was (to paraphrase):

“practicing public relations in a different place outside your own by applying communication, managing relationships, and understanding and taking into account cultural differences.” Upon examination of the responses relating to the definition of international public relations, several themes emerge.

Communication is often at the core

Many respondents used the word “communication” in their definitions. Phrases such as applying communication, manage communication, deliver communication, communicating with publics, integration of infrastructures via communication, communicate effectively with diverse publics in various countries or languages, develop communication-oriented programs, involves communication opportunities and actions, and working with communications across different cultures, were used.

Something is “different”: Know your audience

Certain words were frequently mentioned; perhaps the most prevalent one being the word “different.” According to the respondents, international public relations
involves different societies, different social systems, different or diverse publics, different cultures, different countries, different languages, different places, communicating with someone who’s different from you, and cultural differences. These differences often related to publics or key audiences, usually in targeting different publics.

A public relations practitioner with 30 years of experience working in the field, defined the term this way: “I think it’s using the very strong principles…of public relations practice, the best of the body of knowledge that exists, and then having the ability to cross-culturally understand different areas of the world in which you are practicing. And, not to use the same model that you might use in America because you’ve been educated in America or you’re an American, but rather to modify the model, or develop models for working in different cultures.” She highlighted the need for altering one’s approach depending upon the culture in which one was working.

Other practitioners also noted this distinction in their definitions. A manager of healthcare and corporate practices for a regional division of a global PR firm defined international PR as “a scientific approach to working with communications across different cultures and trying to adapt either locally-produced content to a mass market audience or, a mass market-produced content to a local audience.” A public relations manager for worldwide sales and travel operations who works in the tourism industry said that international PR is how practitioners deliver communication, develop relationships and manage issues “taking into account cultural differences appropriate to each market.”

A professor of public relations who has 31 years of professional experience and who has never taught an international public relations course explained that international
PR involves looking at issues about cultural differences, interpreting messages and understanding how to use the public relations process well in another country. “Really it’s just paying attention to your publics and having a broader market for what it is you’re doing. And I don’t mean ‘market’ just in terms of sales, either…so I mean, the NGOs [nongovernmental organizations], a lot of those kinds of things that are out there that are affecting the way we live, or trying to get our attention for what it is they’re doing.”

Distance is a primary factor

Several respondents mentioned a sense of distance. They viewed international PR as something that is practiced across a border, on a broader scale or global scale, or in a place other than the organization’s country of origin.

One PR educator from a university in the southeastern United States who had worked abroad for several years, defined international public relations this way:

“International public relations really involves communication opportunities and actions that take place in different places, where the boundaries are the globe itself and not a particular location….there are communication problems and opportunities that occur outside of your home market…and they may, in fact, spill across many countries.”

A professor at a university in the western United States shared a similar opinion:

“It would be the comparison of public relations practices across political and cultural boundaries. But international public relations also I think involves the study of how other countries outside of your own system actually do similar kinds of activities….It also includes efforts by international organizations to conduct public relations on their behalf and to influence public opinion in the United States….organizations in a foreign country coming into another country, and trying
to…promote, educate, inform the relation—whatever term you want to use for public relations. I feel that’s an element, so it’s kind of multidimensional, I guess.”

A PR educator who teaches public relations in a university in the central United States also defined international PR with distance in mind: “To me, a company that has an office in Canada or Mexico is international. It may not be as broad as a company like an oil company that has operations all around the world, literally; but nonetheless, it is international, it’s just that the difference is the matter of scope. You’re going to have the same kinds of problems or opportunities whether you’re dealing across a border with Canada or whether you’re dealing across 35 borders around the world, aren’t you?”

Is global public relations a more fitting term?

Some of the respondents preferred the term global public relations to international public relations, because they felt the term was more appropriate and inclusive. One public relations educator from a midwestern university who has taught public relations for 21 years, including several stints teaching courses abroad, said she had a problem with the word “international” because she thought Americans interpreted it as “[only for those] outside the United States.” She gave an interesting example: an international student organization on campus (comprised mainly of students who come from other countries and are studying at this university) hosts a large dinner for the university community every spring. The dinner features cuisine and entertainment representative of various cultures. But she said most of the university’s students (who are not members of this organization) don’t attend the dinner because they don’t think it’s for them; they think it’s only for the international students. The student-run PR agency that has taken on this student organization as a client, she explained, found that the
terminology of this event was a constraint, that it gave the wrong impression. So they’re going to change the name from the more general International Student Association Dinner to something more inclusive, such as “The World Dinner.” She explained, “The word ‘international’ comes loaded in the American interpretation. Using ‘world’ rather than ‘international,’ that whole thing all of a sudden dissolves about “we/them.”

She also said that the same reasoning applies to international public relations. “I would say I don’t know if the word ‘international’ is an easy word to use; I use ‘global’ a lot more now in my languaging, and that kind of does the same thing as ‘world.’ It’s a little easier to use than ‘world public relations,’ I think. But global public relations seems more inclusive and it doesn’t suggest those out there vs. here.”

Another PR educator, who has researched international public relations extensively and has taught a global public relations course for many years, agreed: “International suggests that the distinctions are only from national border to national border, and that certainly isn’t true….a national border is not where the distinctions are solely, certainly, but even the majority of the distinctions aren’t.” He also added, “The idea of ‘global’ suggests that there is a commonality that can be, if not achieved, at least strived for, so in that respect I like the concept of “global” rather than international public relations….and [global public relations] takes into consideration the social, economic, political distinctions. ” He explained that he believed through understanding and building positive relationships, global public relations could help to achieve a kind of societal harmony by acknowledging commonalities between cultures.

A third educator and long-time administrator who has taught many public relations and journalism courses, defined international public relations simply as: “Just
global public relations, public relations practiced on a global level.” She further explained, “But we’re there anyway, if you’re practicing public relations in the United States today, whether you want to be or not, you’re practicing global public relations, because there’s nothing local, anymore, with satellite television and all the communication that we have now, everything is global.”

In defining international public relations, interviewees considered several important elements to public relations: the essential function of communication, the need to tailor PR practices according to different contexts or publics, practicing PR across boundaries, and striving for commonalities between people of different cultures.

**RQ2: What types of roles describe the practitioners working in international public relations?**

All practitioners fit the “manager” role

The practitioners worked in a variety of fields, including transportation and packaging, entertainment and tourism, agency work and independent firm work. Five worked in corporate public relations, two worked in agency, one worked in education and another owned a PR firm. All of the practitioners occupied the “manager role.” Of the five practitioners who worked in corporate and the two in agency, all participated in decision-making for their respective PR units and held a lot of responsibility to execute and manage policies, programs and campaigns. The practitioner who worked in education was a PR director for a university’s business college, and also occupied a managerial role. He supervised a staff and worked closely with the top management, which was in his case the Dean of the college, to help develop and execute the mission and programs of the business college. The practitioner who owned her own firm is in a
bit of a different situation since she is the top person in her organization, but she also supervised a team of personnel who carried out many of the traditional technician functions, such as creating brochures for clients.

The older and more experienced participants had more responsibilities and more managerial duties than the younger practitioners. For example, a public relations manager for worldwide sales and travel operations for an international tourism and entertainment company said some of her duties included working with travel operators and large travel agencies to sell vacation packages, keeping the clients informed about travel-related issues, such as the effects, if any, of bad weather on one of their travel destinations. She also wrote press releases and helped manage the website, two technician-related functions. However, she was the youngest of the practitioners in the sample and had been working in PR for five years.

**Departmental structure**

Many of the departments in which the practitioners worked had a hierarchical structure. Usually they reported to a director or manager of their PR unit, and that person reported to a Vice President of Communication or Public Relations, or similar title. Then that vice president had a seat at the table with the chairman or president of the organization.

This was beneficial for the PR department, especially in one case. The PR manager for the tourism and entertainment company said her department used to be under marketing but it recently became its own independent public relations department. “I report to a director, who reports to the executive vice president of the entire sales and travel operations organization. So right now, I think it’s a great thing for us because now
we’re viewed and we’re valued as part of the key decision-makers on anything that takes place in the company as the sales and travel industry side of things.” She added that the relationship between the department and the top management was really good. “My director reports to the top person in the entire segment, so thanks to that we have our own department. So, we’re very close with the top management.”

PR departments’ involvement in policy decisions of the organizations

Several of the practitioners said that their departments were involved in major policy decisions of their organizations. One female vice president of global communication for an international financial company said, “Oh, we’re very involved….we just recently revamped our policies and procedures for the entire company. And we were all in it, all involved in that, our department. Not only from helping to revise the policies, but also the communicating of the changes in the policies and making sure people knew where to go get the information.”

The role of the Internet and blogs

Practitioners were asked “What is the role of the Internet in your job? How important are blogs?” A blog is a contraction between the words “Web” and “log,” and is defined as “a regularly updated online diary that also features links to news items and stories on the Web…a blog also serves as a public forum for active give-and-take with the blogger [a person running the Web site of the blog]” (Wilcox & Cameron, 2006, p. 351). Blogs have become a place to check for peoples’ opinions or commentary on a host of issues, and companies will sometimes check blogs for what is being said about their clients, services, products and critics.
All the practitioners said that the Internet plays a critical role in communicating with various audiences, as it has enhanced the speed of delivery of messages and services. The female vice president of global communication for an international financial company said that her department uses the Internet as a research tool and as a way to find international news clips that their colleagues may not have seen. She added that they monitor blogs to see what’s being said, but that it’s still a new phenomenon.

A senior PR practitioner at a global PR firm said that blogs have been helpful for monitoring some commentary on current issues, but added, “One has to acknowledge the fact that not all blogs are equal. It depends on who’s blogging…. there are probably thousands of people sitting at home at midnight who have decided to have blogs, and that’s just a tower of babble.”

The female independent firm owner acknowledged that blogs have an impact on clients. “I think it’s an area that is just really, in our industry, beginning to surface as critically important. I don’t think there’s a lot of awareness of the degree to which [practitioners] must pay attention to blogs. How do we use blogs? I think you have to be very careful about how you use them for a client. And they are just, mega-time-intensive, and there’s a lot of dribble in them….but it certainly can influence an opinion or an attitude.”

Encouragingly, all the practitioners occupied the manager role; many of them also had close relationships with top management, contributed to policy decisions in their organization, and used the Internet and blogs to perform the critical environmental scanning function.
RQ3: How has education factored into the careers of the practitioners and educators?

Background of Practitioners

The practitioners all work in an international context, meaning they either have international clients and conduct business with publics outside of the United States, and/or their organization has overseas offices. The ages of the practitioners range from 27 to approximately 60, as two of the respondents did not give their specific ages. The range of practitioners’ work experience also greatly varies, from three years of public relations practice to 40 years.

The practitioners are active in professional associations. All of the practitioners are members of PRSA, and all but two are also members of the PRSA international section. Many of them also belong to a host of other public relations organizations, such as their local PRSA chapter, larger international public relations societies, and various interest-related associations (e.g. sports, tourism, etc.). All of the practitioners have at least a bachelor’s degree, and five of them are pursuing or already have a master’s degree.

Many of the younger practitioners (under age 40) had a degree in public relations or communication. One of the younger practitioners had an undergraduate degree in Spanish but is pursuing a master’s degree in mass communication and public relations. Another has a degree in international relations and was pursuing an MBA. The older practitioners had degrees in fields such as English, liberal arts, Spanish and African-American studies. They said that they either didn’t know they were going to practice
public relations when they were going to college, so they didn’t study it in school, or that PR was not offered as a field at their colleges.

Almost all of the practitioners were fluent in a foreign language, the most common language being Spanish. The other fluent languages were English, French and Italian. Four of the practitioners were from another country, so they were fluent in both their native language and English. One practitioner reported that she knew a small amount of Portuguese and could understand written French. Another reported that she was learning Japanese.

Practitioners were asked, “Are there any courses that you took in college that you think contributed to your international public relations career?” The younger practitioners responded more positively to this question, since they had studied PR in college. The most often-cited “helpful” courses given by respondents were their writing courses. Other courses that were mentioned were: research methods; international mass media; business courses and MBA courses; international relations; campaigns; issues management; and Spanish. One practitioner said the English literature courses she took were helpful, and her education courses as part of her minor in secondary education. Another practitioner said his liberal arts curriculum, which included history, literature, philosophy and fine arts, was helpful in setting a broad foundation of how society has developed and evolved.

Several practitioners grew up in another country, and some also completed a college degree at a university in another country. They said having that international background already gave them a unique perspective in looking at public relations and dealing with multicultural publics. A few practitioners mentioned that other experiences
outside of the classroom, such as internships or on-the-job training, had also helped them in developing international and cultural understanding.

A male practitioner who works as a PR director of a university business college had served in the U.S. Army during Vietnam and worked in the public affairs office editing a magazine. He later worked at a large international media company that provided detailed protocol manuals with cultural information on just about every country to help prepare practitioners before going abroad. He said the manual contained helpful information on customs and currency exchanges. “So if you were going to, say Argentina, or in my case, Russia, you could flip to that and you would find out a lot of the local customs, you’d know what the denomination of the money, and what that meant. There were a lot of things that were very handy, it was an international company, so they prepared you. And then they had someone who would brief you on that country before you went over. So….even though this wasn’t formal education, it was kind of informal education provided by the employer, and helped a lot when you got over there to understand what was going on.”

A young female practitioner who works for an international entertainment company said that she didn’t take any international courses in her undergraduate program, but she mentioned that participating in PRSSA in college and doing internships helped her improve her writing skills and provided her with some real-world experience. She also said that she had a professor who was international (from South Africa) for one of her public relations classes, and she was able to talk with her ask questions about international public relations. She also had completed an internship where she assisted in
the publicity and promotion of a major league soccer team that included some international players.

Background of Educators

All of the educators had a doctoral degree, either a Ph.D. or a Ed.D. Almost all had degrees in mass communication, communication, journalism, or public relations. One educator had received a bachelor’s degree in English and another had also earned an MBA. Their years of experience in teaching in public relations full-time ranged from 5 years to 38 years.

The ages of the educators ranged from 42 to 72; most were in their mid-50s, although two declined to give their age. The educators were very active in professional associations. All but one were members of PRSA and the PRSA Educator’s Academy. Ten of the 12 educators belonged to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC). Half also belonged to the International Communication Association (ICA), the National Communication Association (NCA) and a few other professional communication associations, including local PRSA chapters.

The educators, on the whole, had little international educational preparation. Only one of the educators reported studying abroad when she was in college. Most did not take any international courses in their college careers, although a few said they took one international communication or international PR course during their doctoral studies. One had received a degree abroad and one educator did have a degree in foreign service and her doctorate focused on intercultural communication. Most of the professors said they did not speak a foreign language. Only two educators said they were fluent in a foreign language (both spoke Spanish); a few others said they knew small amounts of
Arabic, French, Swedish, Spanish, German, and Czech. Many said they wished they could speak a foreign language and some said they wished they had the opportunity to take more international courses and study abroad during their college careers.

When asked how they got into public relations, many professors gave various reasons. All of the educators have worked in public relations in some form, either as a consultant in addition to their teaching responsibilities and/or had also worked in PR before going into teaching full-time. Some have worked for several years before going back to graduate school. Some of the areas they have worked in include newspapers, educational PR (e.g., PR for a university), government PR, and corporate. Their years of experience in working in PR full-time (not counting the teaching) ranged from a few years off and on to 31 years. All six professors who did not teach an international PR course worked for several years before going back for their Ph.D. One had practiced public relations for a bank and a hotel; one had been a PR director of a zoo and a hotel; one had her own graphic design business and worked in university and agricultural communication offices; one worked for many years doing PR for the banking industry; and one had worked for a pharmaceutical company for many years (and lived abroad in Europe for a few years while working for this company).

Almost all of the professors who taught an international course had gotten involved in teaching international public relations by teaching PR courses overseas at mass communication or journalism programs in foreign countries. All of the six educators who teach an international PR course have studied and written extensively about the topic and have published many articles in well-known public relations journals and have also presented papers at international conferences.
RQ4: How important do educators and practitioners think that international courses are for public relations students?

The importance of international courses

All participants were asked how important they thought international courses were for public relations students and were asked about the importance of several courses or content areas that have been suggested as necessary preparatory courses for public relations students (several of which were recommended in the 1999 Commission Report). These courses were:

- International public relations course
- Intercultural communication course
- Foreign language course
- International business course
- International history course
- International geography course
- International politics or economics course

After the pilot study a numerical rating scale was added, where participants were asked to rate each course on a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).

The first three courses were consistently rated as being very important, or were given a 4 or a 5 by almost all of the respondents. This was true regardless of subject category; that is, in almost all cases, practitioners; educators who taught an international course; and educators who did not teach an international all consistently gave these first three courses very high marks. Some respondents, however, had questions about the distinctions between an “international PR course” and an “intercultural communication
course.” Some viewed the two courses as being almost synonymous and covering similar topics, while others viewed them as distinctly separate courses. Many practitioners and educators said they rated highly courses in a foreign language because a foreign language allowed them to connect on a deeper level with their publics. One female practitioner said one of her biggest challenges is the language barrier between her and her colleagues when she travels abroad to her organization’s branch offices. She said, “I’m often challenged by being in rooms with my colleagues from other countries, and they don’t feel comfortable speaking English so amongst themselves they speak their language, and I’m not quite sure what they’re saying. That’s what makes me come home quickly and try to learn languages.” She added that although she uses a translator, she would prefer to be able to understand her colleagues and converse with them without one.

The ratings for international business were mixed; about half rated the course as being very important—at a 4 or a 5—while others rated it lower, around a 3. Those who rated it lower said “it depends on where the student wants to work” and “it depends on where the course is being taught”; one educator said she didn’t think business schools were doing a good job in teaching business courses because they were often “too parochial” in their perspective. Another educator agreed, and said she thought that international business was sometimes taught from primarily an American perspective. A senior practitioner at an international PR firm rated this course toward the lower end, saying that it depended where the student wanted to work. He noted that if the student was going to work in a more localized field, such as doing public relations for a local hospital, then the international business knowledge may not be as applicable in that case.
as it would be if he or she were going to work for a multinational corporation such as General Electric.

International history was mostly rated as important or very important with scores of 4 or 5, although a few participants rated it at a 3. Many of the respondents who rated it highly expressed similar sentiments: they often noted that it gave students a sense of perspective as to the development of nations and an understanding as to how current world conflicts have evolved. A PR director of a university business college said that while history was important to know, students could really learn that on their own and that he didn’t think it was absolutely necessary to the curriculum.

Asking about international geography brought upon chuckles from several respondents. Most rated the course either at a 5 or a 3. Those who rated it as a 5 (and who also chuckled along with their response) said they did so because students today don’t know where anything is located both domestically and internationally.

An educator at a large university in the southern United States who had been teaching for more than 40 years remarked, “I insist on keeping a world map in the room in which I teach, all the time, and when I have to teach in one of the other large classrooms, I have a rolled up map that I bring with me. It’s just amazing; some of the students that we have—and we don’t really have any dumb kids—but they don’t know the United States, much less the world. They’re lucky if they can find New York. It’s appalling is what it is.” Others shared her sentiments. A professor at a southeastern university also used the word “appalling” to describe American high school students’ lack of geographic knowledge and underscored the importance of geography in international PR practice. “I think if you’re going to work in international, certainly, you
need to have an understanding of what role geography plays and has played through the
development of nations and certainly in conflicts, which oftentimes are longstanding
border disputes.”

A professor at a university in the central United States, who does not teach an international course but advises many PR students in her department, likened certain courses to popular fashion: “And I think students—just observation—know too little of geography. I think in the relatively recent past, geography has not been a glamorous course. And the world is getting smaller, and we need to know people are governed by their geography, to at least some degree, as they are by their history and by their economic system and so forth….I’m just reporting what I observe, I have no reason for it, except that I do feel like courses are either ‘in’ or they’re ‘out,’ like fashion, to some degree.” She said she encourages her students to take geography courses.

Some professors who teach an international course in their PR departments said they include a geographical component in their courses. Some give weekly geography quizzes, while others discuss current events in various countries and analyze the PR aspects of those events. Conversely, other professors rated geography lower because they said it was a course to which students were either “already exposed” or “should be exposed” through the university’s general education requirements. The same was true of an international history course.

Many participants also rated an international politics or economics course very high as well because they have an effect on current events. One professor who teaches an international PR course noted, “When something happens in one part of the world, an economic disaster of some kind, it affects everybody….we need a global economics
course so that people understand money markets and how money flows and the significance of that, and also people need to know how countries make their money, and what they do with it, and who has it, and who doesn’t have it.” Another professor, who also teaches an international PR course, agreed and said that knowledge of economics helps practitioners identify trends. “What’s happening in world? Where is money flowing? How is it flowing? What are the big economic concerns? Because you know people have to eat. Who’s eating? Who’s not? Who’s buying what? It shapes a lot of perceptions.”

The Three “R’s”: Writing, Research, and Religion

The participants were asked if there were other courses, in addition to those already mentioned, they thought PR students should have before stepping out into the world of work. The most common responses were a writing class, a research methods class, and a religion class, respectively. Both practitioners and educators stressed the importance of strong writing skills, a critical element of any job. They also stressed research because students would be expected to know how to evaluate and analyze information, and then relate that information to their clients and top management.

Religion was also mentioned by several respondents as being an important course for students to have because many world conflicts, both past and current, are centered in religion. At least one educator mentioned that religion had gained more importance and intrigue since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. One professor who has taught several public relations courses and a few in international PR courses at a university in the southwestern United States said she thinks more comparative religion courses should be offered because so many governments are not secular and are heavily influenced by
religion, which students need to understand when considering the PR implications in those environments. She gave the example of the crisis in Darfur, Sudan. “I think that [students] really do need to understand why some nations respond the way they do….we have lots of places going through some awful experiences right now that are historic, as in Darfur….I think sometimes….we in the United States are so insulated from some of those traumas, historical traumas, that we don’t understand why they get so upset.”

Other classes mentioned were world literature courses, business courses (specifically a finance course designed for PR students; one practitioner called it “a finance for communicators class,” and one educator mentioned a consumer behavior class was needed), a comparative sociology course, and an international media relations class.

**RQ 4a: To what extent do practitioners and educators think international courses contribute to the effectiveness of the PR practitioner's job performance?**

International courses and effectiveness: understanding the world around you makes you more effective

Both practitioners and educators alike agreed that international courses contributed to the PR practitioner’s job performance. Cultural understanding and cultural sensitivity were two common themes reported by the participants. They also emphasized the importance of gaining a broader perspective of how things work and be open to other worldviews.

A PR manager in an international public relations department at a transportation and packaging company said, “In order to be a very well-rounded practitioner, I think you really need to understand what’s going on in the world, and not just have this U.S.-centric view of the world. Because we’ve seen more and more that that’s becoming just more
important in today’s society, you can’t ignore it.” Others also said they think international education is important because knowledge of international practices and policies affects all practitioners, not just those specifically in international PR.

A PR professor at a university in the southern United States who does not teach an international course, but said she does try to incorporate international elements into her courses, said that she tries to help her students realize how important an international awareness is. “I tell them that the world is getting so much smaller these days, and you just have to realize that any company or organization that you work for, they very well may have international offices and/or they’re affected by what happens in the world.”

Many practitioners commented that an international education allows students to be more effective because of their role as counselors to top management. A PR manager in an international PR unit for an international technology company said that an international public relations practitioner “needs to have an even stronger understanding of culture, he needs to be the bridge between cultures. Between the cultures for which he works, and the cultures in which he’s supposed to be the specialist…and the knowledge that upper management, the executive managers are looking for, the expertise, should be contained within this practitioner, this person.”

A PR director of a university business college highlighted the practitioner’s role in participating in a managerial function and helping the organization to be more effective by assisting in the decision-making. “Public relations people are, and should be part of the whole; we’re business people first. And that’s another thing that I think a lot of people don’t recognize, that your role is to contribute to the decision-making process at the highest levels, that’s what you aspire to, is to be on the strategic team that the CEO
has around him. So that when it comes to a public relations issue, the CEO looks to you for advice along those areas. And again, the more you’re able to talk the lingo of business, the better off you are.”

A communications manager for the Latin American region of a television channel pointed out the importance that international knowledge can have in fostering relationships with key publics such as reporters. She said that American journalists have a very “cut and dry” style and are often too busy and to physically meet with PR personnel to build a face-to-face relationship. In contrast, she said in Latin America, “it’s very much about the relationship. You have to develop a relationship with your journalists….In Latin America, you basically start the relationship with a meet-and-greet.”

Finally, respondents said that international awareness helps the practitioner to be more effective in relating to the various publics with whom he or she must work.

A vice president of global communication for an international financial company put it this way:

Well I think that international courses are very important to a public relations curriculum, because one, it builds your cultural sensitivities to the morés and values and customs of those particular countries…and it gives you some historical perspective about where the country has come from and where it’s going. And with public relations, you need to have a handle on some of that to be effective. And to what extent do I think international courses contribute? Oh, yeah! It makes you much more effective, I mean if you’re culturally sensitive, if you have some knowledge of the history of the country, the customs, the ways in which the individuals interact and what they do on a regular basis, of course that makes you much more effective. Because you’re ahead of the game in that you know what’s going on and you know how to communicate with the individuals there.

Overall interviewees believed that international courses, in addition to providing students with a background in international issues, would also help them succeed in
building and maintaining relationships and enhance symmetrical communication with publics in an international context.

**RQ5: What do people who practice and teach international public relations recommend to students to better prepare them for entering the international public relations workforce?**

In order to gain some insight into what steps future PR practitioners should take to be prepared in an international PR environment, all the participants were asked what recommendations they had for students who wanted to work in international public relations. The practitioners and educators who taught an international class were also asked questions about their own perceived level of preparedness in their international experiences, if they felt that they were unprepared for a certain situation and if there was something that could’ve helped them. The practitioners were later asked what minimum requirements they had for hiring new practitioners. The themes that emerged in their responses are discussed below.

**Recommendations for students who would like to work in international public relations**

Practitioners and educators both had similar recommendations for students. Across the board, the top three recommendations were: learn a foreign language well, have at least one internship (if not two), preferably one that was either abroad or for an international company in the United States, and have some international travel or study experience. Many interviewees encouraged students to study abroad during their college careers to gain some exposure to living in a different culture, but some mentioned an even more beneficial experience would be if the student could combine the study abroad
experience with an internship while living abroad, either for an international company or a PR firm.

A practitioner who works for a global PR firm said that foreign language is invaluable in helping students to understand different worldviews and cultural differences: “I think students first need to be exposed to a different language, because sometimes even if you haven’t traveled abroad, just by learning a different language the words will teach you different approaches to issues and subjects.” An educator who’s taught several international courses and has extensive international work experience agreed. “…Language tells you how people think; that’s what the study of the language does. And it makes it possible for you to read the literature, which also gives you a lot insight into countries. So to find one that you really are interested in and learn everything you can about it.”

Several practitioners and educators also recommended that students take international courses (such as the courses discussed in the previous research question) and hone their writing skills. One practitioner suggested that students find something they are passionate about and volunteer for an organization that enhances that passion. Three educators suggested that students pay attention to the news and read publications devoted to international news coverage. Another educator suggested that if students could not study abroad that perhaps they could host an international student from a country they wanted to visit, so they could still interact with a person native to that area and have an experience.

One educator shared an experience in which a former Korean graduate student who had requested a copy of one of her articles to use in his research project returned the
favor to her years later when she visited Korea. He was the CEO of the Korean office a
global PR firm, and upon learning that she was speaking at a conference in South Korea,
offered to meet with her and translate all of her lecture slides into Korean. She said she
was astounded at his commitment and willingness to help her with her lecture. So she
recommended that American students be responsive to international students, to take the
time to really listen to their perspective, and to support them when they can.

Finally, some practitioners also recommended that students be aware of and
prepared to handle certain challenges in the field, such as working with international
media (e.g., in some countries, the media is controlled by the government) and working
with people with different mindsets, worldviews and cultural approaches to doing things.
They also recommended that students keep an open mind when working with people
from different backgrounds.

Level of preparedness and something that could have helped?

The question, “Can you tell me about a situation where you wish you had been
better prepared, and is there something that could’ve helped you?”, elicited mixed
responses. Most interviewees said there was something that surprised them or challenged
them. A few of the educators said that they were good at adapting and improvising in
unfamiliar situations abroad, and were flexible and resourceful enough to figure things
out. Upon some reflection, however, they were able to think of an instance that did
surprise them. For example, one educator who teaches an international course at a
university in the midwestern United States, said she frequently bowed to her colleagues
when in Korea, as was the custom, but that in China, bowing and hand-shaking were not
commonly used in business meetings. She said she learned that not all Asians follow the
same business customs, so people should not assume that they are all treated the same way.

A few of the practitioners noted that they always felt a little unprepared in any international situation, or that one cannot always be completely prepared when working in a foreign market. Each of the nine practitioners shared interesting and diverse stories about something they weren’t prepared for or aware of when working overseas. Many acknowledged that one could not learn everything beforehand and mistakes would happen, but that it was important for people to research everything they could about a country and the local customs, business practices, and so forth before going abroad. One major theme that emerged was the importance of understanding the influence and control the government had over the media in certain countries. This influence greatly affected how public relations was practiced in different places, according to several of the participants. For example, one practitioner said he was surprised to find some Asian countries have been slower to practice issues management and crisis management because government has had a lot of control of media. One educator described a situation in which she was working in a country in the Middle East as a visiting professor and administrator of a communication college, and was asked to do a second job as director of PR for the university. During her time there, an American administrator at the university was killed, and she said she was unprepared for the difficulties between satisfying the media and her employer. The country was ruled by a monarchy, and she said the royalty there never talked to the media and did not agree with U.S. public relations model of giving out all the information upfront in a crisis, even though that was the model she was familiar with, having practiced PR in the United States.
Another major theme was the importance of knowing a foreign language. Several interviewees—both practitioners and educators alike—said they wished they had spoken a foreign language so they could better converse with their colleagues. Some of them have recently started learning a foreign language to help them communicate more effectively in business settings (e.g., a practitioner who traveled to Japan frequently is learning Japanese; an educator who has taught as a visiting professor in Croatia is learning Croatian). A professor who teaches an international PR course and has traveled abroad extensively said she always wished she knew more languages. “It would be so nice to be able to converse with people in their native tongues rather than having them always having to speak to me in English.” She also mentioned a time when she was presenting a paper in Spain and she and the other presenters who did not speak Spanish had to wear headphones to understand the translations. She said she recalled feeling sad, because she could not understand the language.

A manager of healthcare and corporate practices for a regional division of a global PR firm shared a very interesting experience about being unprepared in a crisis. His firm was involved in a project with a pharmaceutical company that was conducting clinical trials for a vaccine for rotavirus. The study had a sample of 62,000 babies in South America. During the lengthy trial period, he explained, several babies died of natural causes, accidents or other ways unrelated to the study, but the deaths were misinterpreted by some to be related to the trials. Soon a negative reaction toward the study surfaced in some countries, and people were outraged because they thought the pharmaceutical company was experimenting with babies.
The manager said that in Mexico, for example, people were used to clinical trials and what they entailed and their consequences, but in Costa Rica the people had not been exposed to the available information on clinical trials and were misinterpreted the accidental deaths as resulting from the vaccine. So to deal with the negative public opinion, he said he had to separate what happened to the subjects in trials and what happened to those who died. In his crisis management strategy, he said he also had to be upfront and honest about the causes that led to the babies’ deaths, how they were unrelated to the trials and that ultimately, the new vaccine would be beneficial for the population.

He said the public relations goal was to raise awareness about the condition of the disease, the importance of clinical trials and why local governments were supporting this initiative. Further, he said he had to explain how the vaccine tests were far from the inaccurate interpretation of experimenting with babies. He said that particular situation was something that was very difficult to be prepared for, but that the firm should have raised awareness about the purposes and importance of the trials beforehand. He also noted that it is important to measure the different audiences’ level of familiarity and knowledge of clinical trials in a large-scale project such as this.

Requirements for a job in international public relations

The practitioners all expressed the same responses when asked, “If you were hiring a PR practitioner to work in international public relations, what would be the minimum educational and experiential requirements you’d be looking for?” They all said they would be looking for some type of work experience, such one or two internships in the international field, and strong foreign language background. They also emphasized
some kind of international experience (either working abroad, having studied abroad, or
even having traveled abroad), coupled with an understanding of cultural sensitivity, the
same as the top three recommendations given earlier. This understanding would allow
them to be able to work better with diverse groups of people. One female practitioner
who owns her own PR firm said she likes to hire double-majors and majors other than
public relations, too, (such as political science, English and psychology) because they can
see the “bigger picture.” She said if they are smart and know how to write and if they’ve
also had some foreign travel or study experience, they can be trained on the job.

Conclusion

Based upon the recommendations and requirements given by the educators and
practitioners, it is clear that students who would like to work in international public
relations need to have strong foreign language skills, some work experience in some type
of international area, and some travel experience. Students also need to have a deep
understanding of media in other countries and cultural differences relating to conducting
business with individuals of different backgrounds to be effective in international public
relations practice. It is critical that PR educators find ways to assist students in acquiring
these skills, either through coursework or extracurricular channels, to ensure that they are
prepared to understand the environments in which they would work in international
public relations.
RQ 6: What constraints and opportunities exist for increasing international public relations education in the public relations sequence within communication programs in colleges or universities in the United States?

Constraints

All the six educators who do not teach an international course mentioned several of the same constraints for offering international courses in their PR curricula. While keeping in mind that the PR departments in these six universities vary in size (each in number of students, courses and faculty) and departmental affiliation (i.e., if the program is housed in a journalism department vs. a speech communication department; if it is a stand-alone major or an emphasis within another major such as journalism or speech communication), the professors expressed the same comments. The major themes that emerged in this section were: there are not enough faculty to teach another course; the guidelines set forth by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) make it difficult to offer extra courses and many PR programs are “too full” with existing courses; and other courses (besides international) are being considered for addition to the curriculum.

Not enough faculty

The primary and most-often cited constraint they all gave was a lack of teaching resources; they didn’t have enough faculty to teach an extra course. A professor and department head at a university in the southeastern United States said his department had close to 600 majors, and the faculty were pushed to teach the existing classes. Another professor at a four-year public university in the Southeast said that she is the only full-time permanent PR faculty member, yet there are approximately 200 PR majors, and the
major is growing. Due to the small size of the department, she said they can only offer five PR courses. Another professor who teaches at a university in the central United States said all of the faculty in her department teach four courses every semester, and two of the courses offered are considered “general ed” courses, which must be taken by every student at the university to fulfill general education requirements. She said public relations had become very popular and more and more students at her university were selecting it as a major. She said due to this growth, public relations, formerly an emphasis in the speech communication major, will be its own stand-alone major as of Fall 2006.

Another professor at a large, public university in the southeast who’s been teaching for 12 years said that not only are there not enough faculty to teach extra courses, but there aren’t enough faculty with the expertise in international to teach such a course. She said it was still a growing field of study, and that international PR or international communication courses were not readily taught in many graduate programs when she and her colleagues were in school.

**Lack of flexibility due to ACEJMC accreditation guidelines**

The second most often-cited constraint was the ACEJMC accreditation guidelines limited the number of courses the departments could require for a public relations program and decreased flexibility in adding new ones. One very important theme that emerged in this section was the public relations programs that didn’t currently offer an international course were already “too full” with courses for their students. Among all six educators whose department did not currently offer an international course, all said that they believed international courses were important, yet that their students already had
so many classes they had to take, and trying to fit in extra international courses would be quite difficult.

A professor at a university in the western United States said the accreditation standards would make it extremely difficult for PR departments to require a course in international public relations. “…The accreditation restrictions really force us to prioritize what courses really have to be required. You start dealing with course offerings by department, they are going to obviously deal first the courses that are required and second, with courses that have high student populations and high demands.”

Another professor and administrator at a university in the mid-Atlantic region noted: “We struggle every day, with ‘how are we going to fit everything into the number of credit hours that are required for graduation?’ And we’ve pretty much maxed out what we can do right now and still be an accredited program.” Another professor at a university in the southern United States echoed that sentiment, saying that the students have so many credits they need to graduate (in this case, 125) that there’s no flexibility in the program to add anything new.

A third professor at a large university in the southeastern United States mentioned that adding an international course to the public relations curriculum would be a concern, because if the course was required, it would have to be available to all 600 majors. He said that the undergraduate public relations major does not have a lot of flexibility in it because the requirements are based on the ACEJMC guidelines.

ACEJMC Guidelines

Eight of the 12 schools from which educators were interviewed are accredited by ACEJMC, according to its website (“ACEJMC Accredited Programs”). The Accrediting
Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications currently accredits 109 programs in journalism and mass communications in 39 states and the District of Columbia, and one program in Chile (“ACEJMC Accredited Programs”).

ACEJMC guidelines stipulate that a journalism and mass communication unit require that “students take a minimum of 80 semester credit hours or 116 quarter credit hours outside of the unit and a minimum of 65 semester credit hours or 94 quarter credit hours in the liberal arts and sciences (as defined by the institution) outside of the unit. ACEJMC expects at least 95 percent of the graduating classes in the two academic years preceding an accreditation visit to meet this requirement” (ACEJMC Accrediting Standards, 2006, section 2 “Curriculum and Instruction”). Consequently, the students have a cap as to how many courses they can take inside their major.

Other courses may be offered in the future

A third constraint is that PR departments have other courses, in addition to international PR, that they would like to offer in the future. In some way, these courses may serve as “competition” for an international PR course as there may be more demand or perceived need for these courses. One professor mentioned that a crisis course or branding course may be taught in the near future, and the department is also considering requiring a software design course that would be taught as a “distance education” class. This method makes it more manageable to introduce into the curriculum, he said, because it would not exert the same demands on faculty and classroom resources as offering a traditional lecture-format class. He said this course would teach students advanced skills in software programs such as PhotoShop and InDesign. Another professor said her department may offer another writing course, a one-credit course in business
management or a course in entertainment PR as many of her students want to work in that field. She said the faculty tries to consider all these factors and determine how to best prepare their students for their careers by providing them with the best skills they can. She also mentioned that her department has begun discussing the possibility of creating a master’s program, so there could potentially be graduate-level courses that might be implemented in the future before an international PR course.

A third professor said her department may offer a course on NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] or government and institutional public relations later in the future. A fourth professor said her department is beginning to offer a risk communication course and is discussing introducing an audience analysis course that would be taught from a consumer behavior standpoint. Another professor said his department may offer a crisis management course and perhaps an online public relations course that explores the applications of technology in PR.

**Conclusion**

Despite its recognized importance and utility, international public relations education faces several constraints. There are not enough faculty to teach an international PR course and students already have several curricular requirements they must meet. The international public relations course is not the only one being considered as an addition to PR programs, as described above. There are other courses that offer practical skills that educators feel are also important for students to learn. In addition, there are policy limitations that restrict its growth—at least for now.

There was also some discussion as to whether an international course should be offered at the undergraduate level or at the graduate level; one professor at a university in
A practitioner who works for a global PR firm and who has served on various educational committees expressed a similar concern. He said students have to master a liberal arts curriculum and hone basic skills such as writing and research during their undergraduate education, so they may not have the time and need to also take an international PR course. Instead, he advised that students “get a little bit of experience under their belt and...understand how important international is to their respective organizations....So, to me at least, the ideal is undergraduate degree, a little bit of experience, a graduate degree with perhaps an emphasis on international.” He noted that many students would not get the chance to be sent abroad on an international assignment directly out of college, that they would have to work for a few years for a large agency or corporation before they had that opportunity. In the meantime, they would be able to focus their educational goals for pursuing a graduate degree after a few years of working.
Opportunities

While there are several constraints that inhibit the growth of international public relations education in public relations programs in the United States, there are also several opportunities to encourage its growth.

Possibility of adding international courses in the future

First, all the professors (those in departments who do not currently offer an international PR course) said they think international courses are important and would offer them if they had more faculty to teach them. Five of the six professors said they would probably be adding a course in the future, although some were more certain than others as they had hired new professors who could potentially teach an international course.

Two professors said their departments had just hired new faculty members with diverse backgrounds who might teach an international course in the next two or three years. Another professor and administrator at a mid-Atlantic university said her program will begin offering a graduate level international PR course that includes an international work experience built-in with a three-week tour of a different continent. She said the program is designed for PR practitioners working who’ve returned to school but continue to work part-time. So if their company has a branch abroad, they could complete their work experience there, or complete it for a multinational organization in the United States if their job or other commitments wouldn’t permit them to leave the country for that length of time, she said.

A professor and administrator at a university in the southeastern United States, who had also spent 20 years working for two multinational companies, said he has taught
a graduate-level seminar with revolving topics each year, and international PR was the main topic the last time he taught it. He also said that the undergraduate management course contained a large international unit, and that the department was looking into offering an undergraduate international course in the future. The professor at the university in the central United States said her department has begun to talk about the possibility of adding an international course to the curriculum and with the potential of more funding, they may be able to hire a new faculty member to teach the course.

**Effort to incorporate international elements into existing PR courses**

Several of the educators, among both those who teach an international course and those who do not, said they believed that international elements should be offered in every PR class, and they try to incorporate them into all the classes they teach. They do so by using examples in class and giving students assignments in which they have to analyze the PR aspects of current events. One professor said her department made a firm commitment to integrate international elements and ethics into every course each faculty member teaches. Another professor, who doesn’t teach an international course, but whose department had a three-year grant with a university in a country that was part of the former Soviet Union, said the visiting professors from there spoke to her classes and her students had to do a project about some PR aspect of that country.

**Inviting professionals to speak to classes**

The PR practitioners were asked for suggestions on how professionals can help to broaden international public relations programs at universities. The most common response (provided by 7 out of 9 practitioners) was inviting professionals to speak to students through guest lectures, or even through a co-teaching opportunity where
professionals could either teach an international PR course individually or alongside a professor. Two of those practitioners more specifically suggested having three to five different speakers representing different areas of practice (e.g., corporate, agency, government, etc.) or different geographic areas (e.g., someone who had worked in Europe, someone who had worked in Latin America) and share their experiences while tailoring their remarks to their area of expertise. In addition, all of the nine practitioners said they would consider teaching an international PR course in the future, and many of them were very interested in teaching one in the near future. Four of the nine practitioners had previously given guest lectures and/or taught a course at a university in the past.

Other suggestions

Some practitioners suggested that professionals join a journalism college’s advisory board and work with the administrators in improving the curriculum (one practitioner currently serves on a journalism college’s advisory board). A PR director for a university’s business college suggested that PR programs foster a partnership with the business college at their university and share resources and participate in joint activities, as many business programs are already international in scope. Another practitioner with 40 years of experience in PR practice, suggested working with major corporate PR practitioners or firms to establish a scholarship for students or a chair in public relations; he gave the example of practitioner Besty Plank who established a center in her name at her alma mater, the University of Alabama. The Plank Center for Public Relations Studies, established in 2006, provides students and faculty with funding for teaching,
research, and workshops and conferences in public relations (Public Relations Society of America, 2005).

Finally, some practitioners also noted that professionals should build relationships with the recruitment offices on campus and professors to offer internships at their international companies or international PR firms to students. One practitioner stressed the importance of offering a “meaningful” internship in which the students’ work would be reviewed and they would be given responsibility. Another practitioner suggested that students could shadow a professional for at least 3 days where the students could have a chance to be involved somehow and work alongside the practitioners.

**Schools mentioned that offer an international course as part of the PR curriculum**

Participants were asked to name any colleges or universities in the United States they could think of which offered an international course as part of the PR curriculum. A total of 39 schools were mentioned, and 18 of those were mentioned more than once. The top four schools listed were: University of Florida, University of Maryland, Syracuse University and University of Miami. Indeed, all four of these programs offer a course, or in some cases, several courses and study abroad opportunities, in international public relations. While some participants—educators and practitioners alike—had difficulty coming up with any schools, many of them were able to accurately list more than one school that did, in fact, offer an international course as part of the PR curriculum. The remaining 14 schools mentioned at least twice were: Virginia Commonwealth University, Ball State University, New York University, UNC-Charlotte, American University, University of Northern Iowa, University of Missouri, Texas
Christian University, Rutgers University, UNC-Chapel Hill, Stanford University, Harvard University, Florida International University, and the University of Houston.

Conclusion

It is encouraging to find that several schools are offering, and some are considering offering, an international course in their public relations curriculum. Equally encouraging is the concerted effort by several professors to integrate international elements into their existing PR courses as a means to expose students to cultural differences. Also, the possibility of practitioners taking an active role in guest lecturing or teaching an international course would be helpful in supplementing the content in existing PR curricula. Serving on an advisory board or offering internships is yet another step that practitioners can take to assist in enhancing international PR programs. Finally, by offering internships to students, they can give them a first-hand look into the field and show them how some of the classroom knowledge can be applied to the practice.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

This study sought to fill some major gaps in the literature concerning international public relations education. Generally, the study asked both PR educators and PR practitioners about their perceptions of the utility and importance of international PR education. Specifically, the study asked both PR educators and PR practitioners about their definition of international public relations; the roles filled by international PR practitioners; how the educational background of practitioners educations has factored into their careers; the utility and importance of international courses and their contribution to practitioners’ effectiveness; other areas that can help to prepare future practitioners in the field; and barriers and opportunities for expanding international PR curricula.

**Definition of international public relations**

Returning to Culbertson’s (1996) definition mentioned at the beginning of this study, international public relations refers to the “practice of public relations in an international or cross-cultural context. . . . it involves public relations practice in at least four different realms: international organizations; intergovernmental relations; transnational economic transactions; and interactions among citizens of different nations” (p. 2). His definition does not explicitly state the duality of PR being practiced either on behalf of a foreign nation in the United States—as with the Chinese cultural tour in 2000
sponsored by the Chinese government—versus the United States practicing abroad. While he does include the realm of “interactions among citizens of different nations,” he does not state that international PR should not be viewed only from the perspective of practitioners based in the United States.

An outcome of this study is not to propose one single definition of international public relations; as was found in the various definitions given by the participants and in the literature, there are many interpretations and evolutions of the term. However, as Culbertson’s definition is now ten years old, it could use some updating by incorporating some of the aspects mentioned by the participants. Culbertson’s definition focuses on different realms in which public relations is practiced, it does not specifically address relationships, an important element used by many of the practitioners and educators in their definitions. While some of the respondents’ definitions seemed too simplistic or general, it is encouraging to hear that several people mentioned international public relations being practiced in different contexts and not being strictly an American function overseas. Overall, the interviewees perceived international PR practice as a way to improve society through effective communication and tailoring messages to different situations, markets or publics. They interpreted international PR to be beneficial to society in establishing and building relationships with international audiences, and in fostering intercultural understanding.

Perhaps a modified definition of international public relations for the 21st century is: International public relations is the communication-centered practice of effectively managing relationships with international audiences to foster intercultural understanding.
and considering cultural differences in tailoring messages to different situations, markets or publics.

**Practitioner roles in international public relations**

It is encouraging to note that the practitioners interviewed in this study all fulfilled the managerial role, at least in some ways. While a few did practice aspects of the technician role, it is likely that with time and experience they will rise in their profession to a more full-scale managerial level. Since public relations is a management function, it’s important that practitioners in this specialized field fulfill that role in assisting their organizations’ top management in decision-making and contributing to the effectiveness of the organization.

Also encouraging was the fact that several of the younger practitioners, both males and females under the age of 40, were already at the managerial level, both males and females. But again, these results may not be typical of many PR practitioners working in international public relations; they just offer a small glimpse into the field.

**Educational background of practitioners and educators**

It is not surprising to find that many of the practitioners had taken courses in international areas, especially foreign language, that they feel helped them in their careers. However, since almost half of the practitioners were from another country and had been raised in a different culture, their experiences are not going to be typical of most PR students, who are born and raised in the United States and attend college in America.

It is also interesting to note that many of the older practitioners (above age 40), and even some of the younger practitioners, sort of “fell into” international public relations and did not plan on it as a career. As some of them mentioned in their
responses, international PR, or even public relations in general, was not a widely-available major or career path when they were in college, but now it’s a more popular career choice for many PR students and is beginning to become more widely available in academic programs.

Equally interesting is that many of the PR educators who teach an international course as part of the public relations curriculum at their universities do not really have an international-based education. But this, again, could be a factor of time and availability of coursework, as international public relations as a field is still quite “young” and consequently not many courses would have been offered in it. Most of the educators are older than a lot of the practitioners, and studying a foreign language and studying abroad was not as common when they were in college than it is today. Also, as many had mentioned, international courses weren’t really an option when they were in college, even 20 years ago. One of the younger educators said that when she was in her graduate program in journalism and mass communication, the only people encouraged to take any kind of international class were those students pursuing an MBA. However, educators should continue to broaden their international academic perspective by participating in workshops, attending international workshops, and collaborating with other scholars in international research.

For the most part, those who practice international PR did have some educational background in it. Most of those who teach it did not, but have educated themselves in other ways (e.g., reading about current events, teaching courses abroad as a visiting professor). Now that international PR is growing as a possible job specialty for many students, educational preparation in international topics will serve them well.
Importance and effectiveness of international courses

It was expected that both educators and practitioners would rate most of the international courses as “very important” for students to have in a PR curriculum, and this, indeed, was the case. In fact, several practitioners and educators said the international courses were “critically important” or “essential.” International courses help the practitioner understand the intercultural aspects of practicing PR in an international, or global, context so the practitioner can be successful in building and maintaining relationships with cross-cultural publics. Also, knowledge and application of intercultural sensitivity builds trust and improves relationships with various publics.

International PR is a growing area of specialization within the field of public relations. One professor said her international PR course had a waiting list and there were students who had waited two or three years to take it. Another professor said public relations was a fast-growing major in her college and starting in Fall of 2006 it would become its own full-fledged major instead of a concentration within speech communication. She added that as the department grows, the next logical step would be to explore the possibility of adding an international course to the PR curriculum.

One practitioner and one educator had mentioned that some practitioners who worked in local, domestic markets may not be called upon to act or think “internationally;” for example working in a local hospital, the practitioner may not be involved in too many international situations. However, even that local landscape is starting to change. Several 911 emergency call centers are able to communicate with several non-English speakers through an over-the-phone interpretation service provided by AT&T Language Line Services. Emergency phone operators in a suburb of Atlanta
receive many calls each day from non-English speakers and none of the 97 people on staff is bilingual (Feagans, 2006, May 15). The top two languages spoken by non-English callers who call for help are Spanish and Mandarin. The Language Line Service helps to ease this barrier by providing live interpreters in more than 150 languages (Language Line Services, 2006).

Foreign language is occupying a larger space in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2003 (the year for which most recent statistics were available), the top two languages spoken at home by people living in the United States were Spanish or Spanish Creole and Chinese (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Nearly 30 million people speak Spanish at home and more than two million people in the United States speak Chinese at home.

What is most encouraging is that the practitioners who had international courses demonstrated that a link exists between the education and the practice; a background in courses such as foreign language, political science, geography, economics, and so forth, helped them in their careers and advancing in their careers. Not only do they think these courses are important, they find them useful. They are able to serve in that managerial role because they can provide the needed expertise in considering cultural nuances between different audiences when crafting messages and building relationships.

The PR educators who taught an international PR course were asked what topics they covered in their class. The topics they covered include: world regions and geography (and some also gave geography quizzes), assigned their students case studies on various international issues (e.g., SARS; Nigeria and transnational oil companies), crisis communication in other countries, models of understanding culture, and had
practitioners come in to give guest lectures. The educators stressed a practical perspective; they wanted their students to learn important concepts they would face in the workplace. Learning about topics such as how an Asian country handles a medical crisis like SARS versus how the United States would handle the same crisis is critically important; the knowledge learned from this classroom experience is something they can use in a real job when confronted with a similar situation.

An interesting finding was the importance of geography. Given how little knowledge American students have of both U.S. and world geography (as shown in the National Geography study) and how highly it was rated by participants, it is curious why this course is lacking so in the American higher education system. Interestingly, some of the professors and practitioners had said certain courses, such as an international geography course or an international history course, should already be part of a student’s general curriculum, so consequently they didn’t rate it as high as some of the other courses. A lot of universities do require some type of international class for students to take to fulfill a general education or core curriculum requirement. But, the course is not always geography.

A perplexing issue is this: if geography should be covered in a general education type of requirement, then why are public relations professors teaching it? Why are American students’ general knowledge of both U.S. and world geography so low? Is this something that should be covered in a PR curriculum? For example, should geography quizzes be standard across all types of international PR courses?

There is really no way to tell. First, different universities have different requirements for general education or core curriculum classes. A geography, history,
politics or similar course may not be required. Some schools may only require one 3-credit course to fulfill an “international” or “cultural” category, if at all, which could be fulfilled by a humanities or art course that may not cover topics such as global conflicts, border disputes, or economic trends. Second, there is currently no method of standardizing the content being taught in an international PR course. Should media be the primary focus of this type of course, or should students also know about interpersonal elements such as communicating with body language and proxemics? Further, while practitioners and educators encourage students to take such a course, it’s not available at all universities.

Third, there is some issue as what the course should be called. International public relations? Global public relations? Multicultural public relations? Intercultural communication? Public relations in a cross-cultural context? Do these all mean the same thing or something different? Guidance for answers to this question may lie in the revised definition of international public relations that emerged from these interviews, which is: international public relations is the communication-centered practice of effectively managing relationships with international audiences to foster intercultural understanding and considering cultural differences in tailoring messages to different situations, markets or publics.

All of these course titles include different elements from the revised definition, such as the “international audiences,” “intercultural understanding” and “tailoring messages to different publics.” However, all the course titles—except the intercultural communication course—relate specifically to public relations. A title such as “intercultural communication” is unclear, and introduces confusion about whether the
course includes public relations topics or not. It would certainly be helpful to have *public relations* in the title, as all public relations is communication-centered, but not all forms of communication focus on PR.

**Recommendations for students entering the international public relations workforce**

It was not surprising that the top three recommendations given by the practitioners and educators were also the top three preferred job requirements given by the practitioners. They were: learn a foreign language well, have at least one internship (if not two), preferably one that was either abroad or for an international company in the United States, and have some international travel or study experience. The foreign language, internship and international experience are all part of enhancing a student’s worldview and giving him or her a broader perspective and makes him or her more marketable. Neff et al. (1999) found in their study on desired outcomes by practitioners and educators that “the lack of a global perspective was also a frequently cited hiring problem” (p.41).

Future practitioners will face numerous challenges in their careers and will need to be able to handle them as effectively as possible. As the practitioners and educators acknowledged, one cannot be completely prepared for every situation, but one can be knowledgeable enough in operating in a multicultural environment to know generally what variable must be considered.
Constraints and opportunities facing international public relations education in the United States

Returning to the 1999 Commission for Public Relations Education, a mastery of knowledge in multicultural and global issues (p. 17), competency and fluency in a second language, and applying cross-cultural and cross-gender sensitivity (p. 17) were cited as recommendations for undergraduate education. Mastery in various content areas including behavioral sciences, in which students should be exposed to cultural anthropology, global trends, evolving global codes of conduct, and behavioral change and knowledge of local, state, national and international political systems (p. 22), were cited as recommendations for graduate education.

Clearly, these concepts are very important, and can be acquired through taking international courses. But if these courses are so important, then why aren’t they more abundant? Why are they so rare? Obviously the ACEJMC guidelines play a big role in it. Perhaps this policy should be revisited or revised in some way to allow for some flexibility. Secondly, there aren’t enough people to teach an international PR course, or not enough qualified individuals to teach the course. Hiring seasoned practitioners in the international field to either co-teach or individually teach an international PR course could solve this problem. Partnerships between PR departments with multinational corporations or international PR firms can help to create internships for students who may be interested in this area.

It would be very difficult and perhaps counter-effective to require that every PR student take an international PR course or a specific number of internationally-oriented courses (such as geography, history, economics, etc.), as the ACEJMC guidelines make
that a near impossibility and students have other courses they may need to take to fulfill their degree requirements for graduation, which is dependent upon individual university and departmental policies. However, there is absolutely a critical need for public relations students in the United States today to know and understand international dynamics and how cultural differences and nuances affect the practice of public relations. This understanding and awareness must be achieved in other ways; if students cannot take a course in international PR, they should be exposed to international elements in their other PR courses, have the opportunity to hear speakers who work in this field and complete internships in this field. Perhaps most importantly, educators must emphasize this need for international awareness and encourage students to become life-long learners, to seek out international knowledge on their own, either through keeping up with international current events, traveling abroad, or learning a foreign language.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of both the utility and importance of international public relations education in practice among public relations educators and public relations practitioners. The results of the study show that there practitioners and educators do perceive an international PR curriculum to be important and promise great utility on the job. International courses help the practitioner understand the intercultural aspects of practicing PR in an international, or global, context. International courses as part of the public relations curriculum are not simply giving students a list of “do’s and don’ts.” They’re really about teaching them different ways of thinking, exposing to a different and broader view of the practice and applying
PR to problems, opportunities, and situations in a cross-cultural and international environment.

The study explored various definitions of the term *international public relations* by those who teach it, those who don’t, and those who practice it. The study also explored the types of roles occupied by practitioners in this field; the background of the people who practice and teach in this field; the level of perceived importance and contribution to effectiveness of international courses; preparatory steps for international public relations practice; and constraints and opportunities that limit or encourage the growth of international public relations education.

What is the current status of international PR education? It is growing and highly valued by practitioners and educators alike, but not as widely available to students as it should be. It needs to be encouraged more at the university level, more international PR courses need to be added to public relations programs.

**Limitations of study**

Being a qualitative study, this study does have its limitations. The findings in this project cannot be generalized to the general population of PR educators and practitioners. Only practitioners and educators in the United States were interviewed, and PR curricula at a only a handful of American colleges and universities were studied. However, the findings can be used to provide insight into the current state of international PR education in the United States.

**Implications for future research**

Because this study is qualitative and utilized a small sample, future studies could expand further research in this area. More surveys guided by this qualitative research
could be conducted among public relations educators to determine which courses their departments are considering adding to the PR curricula, and what barriers exist for adding new courses. Other studies could take a comparative approach and compare the topics in international public relations courses here in the United States with the topics in international public relations courses in other countries. After the updated version of the Commission on Public Relations Education Report is published (presumably sometime near the end of 2006), researchers can examine the new recommendations for both undergraduate and graduate education set forth in this report, and compare how these recommendations have evolved from the previous report seven years ago. The guidelines, assumptions and recommendations in the new Commission Report can be used as a springboard for further studies into the international educational preparation provided in public relations curricula.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Interview Guide for educators who teach an international course in the public relations sequence in their department

Questions for Educators:

1. Tell me about yourself. What do you teach? How long have you been in your current position? Did you work in public relations before teaching?

2. How did you get into the field of international public relations?
   a. Are there any courses that you took in college that you think contributed to your international public relations career?

3. How many years have you taught in public relations?

4. How many years, if any, have you worked in public relations practice before teaching?

5. Have you ever worked abroad or spent any time abroad in a professional capacity?
   a. if yes, where?
   b. for how long?

6. Did you study abroad when you were in college?
   a. if yes, where?
   b. for how long?

7. Do you speak a foreign language? If yes, which language?

8. Can you tell me a situation where you wish you had been better prepared? Is there something that could’ve helped you?

9. What is your definition of international public relations?

10. How important do you think international courses are to a public relations curriculum? To what extent do you think international courses contribute to the effectiveness of the PR practitioner’s job performance?
11. I’m going to read a list of courses or content areas that have been suggested as necessary preparatory courses for public relations students. I’m going to ask you to rate each course on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “not important” and 5 is “very important.”

- International public relations course
- Intercultural communication course
- Foreign language course
- International business course
- International history course
- International geography course
- International politics or economics course

12. Are there other courses that you think are important for PR students that have not already been mentioned?

13. Does your department offer an international course as part of the public relations curriculum?
   a. Since yes (the department does offer a course), what is the title of the course?
      i. Who teaches the course?
      ii. What kinds of topics are covered in the course?
      iii. What assignments are given in the course?
      iv. Which textbook(s) are used?

14. Can you think of any colleges or universities in the United States that are currently offering an international course as part of the public relations curriculum?

15. What recommendations would you make to students who would like to work in international public relations?

16. What is your age?

17. What’s your highest degree completed?

18. Which professional associations do you belong to?

Thank you for participating in the interview, you’ve been a great help.
Interview Guide for educators who do not teach an international course in the public relations sequence in their department

Questions for Educators:

1. Tell me about yourself. What do you teach? How long have you been in your current position? Did you work in public relations before teaching?

2. How did you get into the field of teaching public relations?

3. How many years have you taught in public relations?

4. How many years, if any, have you worked in public relations practice before teaching?

5. What is your definition of international public relations?

6. How important do you think international courses are to a public relations curriculum? To what extent do you think international courses contribute to the effectiveness of the PR practitioner's job performance?

7. I’m going to read a list of courses or content areas that have been suggested as necessary preparatory courses for public relations students. I’m going to ask you to rate each course on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “not important” and 5 is “very important.”

   - International public relations course
   - Intercultural communication course
   - Foreign language course
   - International business course
   - International history course
   - International geography course
   - International politics or economics course

8. Are there other courses that you think are important for PR students that have not already been mentioned?

9. Have you ever taught an international course in a public relations department before?

10. Does your department offer an international course as part of the public relations curriculum?
b. Since no (the department does not offer a course), would you like to offer an international course?
   i. Will you be offering one in the near future, within the next academic year?
      (1) If yes, who will teach the course? What is his or her background in international public relations?
      (2) If not, why? What is preventing your department from offering an international course?

11. Can you think of any colleges or universities in the United States that are currently offering an international course as part of the public relations curriculum?

12. What recommendations would you make to students who would like to work in international public relations?

13. What is your definition of international public relations?

14. What is your age?

15. How many years have you worked in public relations?

16. How many years have you taught in public relations?

17. What’s your highest degree completed?

18. Which professional associations do you belong to?

Thank you for participating in the interview, you’ve been a great help.
Questions for Practitioners:

1. Tell me about yourself. What is your position in your organization? What types of duties do you perform in your current job?

2. How did you get into the field of international public relations?

   a. Are there any courses that you took in college that you think contributed to your international public relations career?

3. Have you ever worked abroad or spent any time abroad in a professional capacity?

   a. If yes, where?

   b. For how long?

4. Did you study abroad when you were in college?

   a. If yes, where?

   b. For how long?

5. Do you speak a foreign language? If yes, which language?

6. How important do you think international courses are to a public relations curriculum? To what extent do you think international courses contribute to the effectiveness of the PR practitioner's job performance?

7. I’m going to read a list of courses or content areas that have been suggested as necessary preparatory courses for public relations students. I’m going to ask you to rate each course on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “not important” and 5 is “very important.”

   - International public relations course
   - Intercultural communication course
   - Foreign language course
   - International business course
   - International history course
   - International geography course
   - International politics or economics course
8. Are there other courses that you think are important for PR students that have not already been mentioned?

9. Have you taught an international public relations course at a university before?
   a. If yes, where? For how long?
      1) What was the title of the course?
      2) What kinds of topics were covered in the course?
      3) What assignments were given in the course?
      4) Which textbook(s) were used?

   b. If no, would you like to?

10. Can you think of any colleges or universities in the United States that are currently offering an international course as part of the public relations curriculum?

11. What is your definition of international public relations?

12. How is your public relations department structured?

13. Who are the main publics of your organization?

14. What is the relationship between the public relations department and top management?

15. How involved is the PR department in major policy decisions of the organization?

16. What is the role of the Internet in your job? How important are blogs?

17. Now, still thinking about your job and your duties, can you tell me about a time where you think you weren’t prepared for a certain situation? Is there something that could’ve helped you?

18. What recommendations would you make to students who would like to work in international public relations?

19. If you were hiring a PR practitioner to work in international public relations, what would be the minimum educational and experiential requirements you’d be looking for?
20. Do you have any suggestions as to how professionals can help broaden international PR programs at universities?

21. What is your age?

22. How many years have you worked in public relations?

23. What’s your highest degree completed?

24. Which professional associations do you belong to?

Thank you for participating in the interview, you’ve been a great help.