

MEMO:

This writing excerpt is the introduction and methodology of my honors thesis research  
entitled

*Ability or Abyss: Does American Public Relations Education Program Accreditation  
Adequately Address the Abilities Necessary for Professional Success?*

## **Introduction**

Professionalism is a highly desired attribute in any profession, and public relations (PR) is no different. Often overlooked but infiltrating every corporate system, PR represents a company or entity in a way that provides and promotes a favorable impression of the entity and builds on social skills and relationships to achieve that goal (Bernays, 2006). Permeating almost every sphere, including government, sports, celebrities, finances, businesses, etc., PR is a pervasive communication not limited to one medium.

In light of this information, possessing an understanding of PR is vital to successful business relations and reputation management. Recognizing the professional atmosphere of the occupation, and especially identifying the ways in which that professionalism is cultivated, prove difficult but necessary tasks. Protecting and building the professionalism of PR becomes more than routine; it becomes vital for execution in the ever-changing modern world.

The professional public relations field, while often underrated, is thriving. As public relations professionals continue to educate corporations and individuals about the necessities of their relations with others, PR becomes solidified as a necessary function. However, other aspects are not as abundant. The college PR education system has many benefits, but depending on the specifics, can lack quite a bit of information and experience that can only come from outside the classroom (Lee, 1974).

Because organizations have such a large need for the tasks of the PR field, there must be a proper and well-equipped population of individuals willing and able to perform those tasks. Having a gap of unengaged students and unfulfilled education requirements would lead to unsuccessful transitions into the workforce and ultimately result in a decrease in the professionalism of the PR field as a whole.

## **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this thesis is to adequately identify and address the proposed disconnect between the professional public relations employment field and the college education program, specifically analyzing if accreditation of PR programs provides the necessary bridge.

PR seems to lack unity and conformity nationally in the United States, and can therefore confuse students about how prepared they are for seeking post-graduate employment in the PR field.

The research questions that arise from these difficulties include:

RQ1: What are the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) for PR professional success in 2017?

RQ2: What is the current state of PR education programs today?

RQ3: Are collegiate educational programs adequately preparing students for PR professionalism?

RQ4: What is PR accreditation and what is its role in the educational sphere?

These clarifications lead to one overarching research question designed to understand the PR field and educational arena at its core, and provide a groundwork for understanding what exists in the PR realm in 2017.

RQ5: In light of modern technological communications, does accreditation of public relations education programs prepare individuals to effectively develop and operate modern public relations skill sets?

These provide a framework for finding and analyzing scholarly sources, as well as understanding the popular culture and the demands both academia and society place on PR education and practice.

## **Methodology**

This thesis will answer the research questions by providing an extended literature review of the professional skills, current requirements and suggested growth, and analyze a similar path of development and improvement in academic PR programs and degrees.

The literature review will lead a study of professionalism in the PR occupation, its development over time, and areas for suggested improvement. In addition, the education for the PR occupation will be considered, its development and suggested improvements arranged in a manner similar to the study of professionalism.

The following chapter will build upon the research in the literature review and discover exactly what KSAs are being discussed by PR professionals in the last several years, from around 2000-2017. Sources will be analyzed for relevancy in relation to time period and peer consistency, and a clear description of current skills required for professional success in the PR field will be determined.

A further chapter will explain the accreditation processes available for the collegiate PR programs in the last ten or fifteen years, including non-accredited institutions. Analysis will take place on the efficiency for each accreditation, and an overall comparison between accreditation processes and non-accreditation options will clarify the benefits of accreditation.

Ultimately, the research analysis will conclude in a description of the usefulness of accreditation processes in achieving not only professionalism in PR, but college readiness for the occupational skills and demands.