

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF ADVERTISING/PUBLIC RELATIONS

LESSONS FROM ALUMNI:  
PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM

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## **ABSTRACT**

Researchers find that the rare and limited discussion about curriculum design among public relations professionals and educators creates disconnect between educational offerings and industry needs. By interviewing Penn State alumni with degrees in advertising/public relations, public relations option, this research project extends on the College of Communications' efforts to identify the value and opportunity in the professional program. Using reflections and suggestions from alumni, this research project offers practical recommendations to help enhance the academic career without altering curriculum requirements.

Keywords: PR education, PR curriculum, PR industry, Penn State, public relations, interview

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
CHAPTER 1 Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER 2 Literature Review .....	7
CHAPTER 3 Methodology.....	17
CHAPTER 4 Findings .....	21
CHAPTER 5 Discussion.....	30
APPENDIX A Communication with Recruitment .....	36
APPENDIX B Interview Guide .....	39
APPENDIX C Interview Transcripts.....	41
Media Relations .....	41
Consumer Marketing.....	58
Social/Digital Media .....	82
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	102
ACADEMIC VITA.....	105

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1 Participant Descriptions .....	18
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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **The Pennsylvania State University's College of Communications**

When pursuing a public relations degree housed within a broader liberal arts education, students strive for well-rounded enrichment while preparing for professional success. The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) offers an advertising/public relations major within the College of Communications. The College's mission statement declares,

The College of Communications offers professional programs that prepare students for the range of responsibilities and opportunities being created by rapid transformations in the field of communications and information policy. Through its teaching, research and outreach, its mission is to prepare students to take their place in society as active, critical, ethical and engaged participants in the information society. (Hardin, 2013, p. 9).

Observing the speed of change in the professional realm, the College of Communications makes it a point to keep up with the pace of the industry. By finding areas to develop within the College of Communications and honoring feedback from alumni, the following research can contribute to the College's mission and faculty's efforts to offer a foundation for a career in public relations.

At Penn State, changes in the College curriculum spark from student need and alumni input (Mulvihill, 2012). However, as a liberal arts university, professors want students to not only succeed in professional endeavors, but also act as citizens of the world. The liberal arts structure exposes students to international cultures, minority studies, worldly history and literature to produce critical readers, thinkers and voters. With these lessons, students can challenge traditions, practices and assumptions that may otherwise go uncontested. A liberal arts education prepares graduates to live in a democracy, not a cubicle.

Public relations professionals perform a range of duties for private companies and nonprofit organizations, in addition to internal communications roles. Therefore, in addition to

their liberal arts education, students pursue professional programs to learn about the major theories and practices in an industry. However career-driven students may express specific professional objectives and want access to information that identifies critical skills and academic opportunities valued in their desired public relations discipline. Access to this kind of career insight would help students direct their formal education and extracurricular activities to position students strategically in the job market. But before exploring future aspirations, it is important to understand the fundamentals behind the public relations curriculum.

### **The College of Communications' Accreditation**

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) acts as the accrediting body for Penn State's College of Communications. ACEJMC currently accredits 114 professional programs worldwide. Penn State is one of the United States' largest nationally accredited mass communications program. Penn State created the journalism major in 1911, which received ACEJMC accreditation in 1948. Since then, every major within the Penn State College of Communications (advertising/public relations, film and media studies, journalism, telecommunications) abides by these accreditation standards. Every six years, the ACEJMC sends a representative to campus to review the program's ability to meet ACEJMC objectives in a formal report (Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, 2013).

### **The Advertising/Public Relations Department**

The College of Communications organized into its existing four departments in fall 2000. In total, 2,636 students registered or scheduled in the College of Communications. As of

February 2015, 343 students registered or scheduled in the public relations option within the advertising/public relations major (K. Kennedy, personal communication, February 17, 2015). With the exception of the media studies major, which offers a more “academic orientation,” the remaining departments focus on professional development (Hardin, 2013, p. 19). Nevertheless, the program keeps a liberal arts focus, rather than acting as a vocational school. Since departmentalizing, the College reduced the number of credits to 120 to encourage internship experience and club involvement (Mulvihill, 2012). Therefore, public relations students average 15 credits per semester to satisfy both their general education and public relations option requirements.

### **The Public Relations Degree Requirements**

The public relations degree option consists of 21 credits with mandatory classes including News Writing (COMM 260W), Introduction to Public Relations (COMM 370), Public Relations Methods (COMM 471), Research Methods in Advertising/Public Relations (COMM 420), and Public Relations Problems/Campaigns (COMM 473). The College encourages students to take additional journalism courses due to the intensive writing required in the industry (The Pennsylvania State University, 2013b). Due to baccalaureate requirements, Penn State requires students to take 45 credits of general education courses. These courses currently encompass writing/speaking (GWS), quantification (GQ), health and physical activity (GHA), natural sciences (GN), arts (GA), humanities (GH), social and behavior sciences (GS) (The General Education Planning and Oversight Task Force, 2014).

The College of Communications also requires students to take six credits in communications electives. The courses offered range from Public Relations and Social Media

(COMM 497C) to International and Intercultural Strategic Communication (COMM 426).

However the availability of these courses depends on the semester. Additionally, the College requires 11 credits from prescribed courses. The College deems these courses as helpful in understanding ways to interpret and understand consumers, markets and data. These courses include Basic News Writing Skills (COMM 160), Introduction to Microeconomics (ECON 102), Introduction to Psychology (PSYCH 100), and Introduction to Elementary Statistics (STAT 200).

The University Bulletin lists popular minors outside of the College of Communications for students in the public relations degree option, including minors in business, English, sociology, psychology, political science, information systems and statistical analysis, foreign language, and speech communication (The Pennsylvania State University, 2013b). The advertising/public relations major does not require, only encourages, minors.

Additionally, the public relations option does not require students to complete an internship in order to graduate. However, College of Communications professors and administrators encourage students to utilize their summers to gain hands-on industry experience. The College of Communications permits students to take an internship for credit, with the number of credits depending on the hours of the individual internship. Yet, anywhere from career services events to a faculty office hours, the College emphasizes an internships' worth.

### **The Voices in Curriculum Change**

The College remains proactive by offering courses based on discussions with alumni, professionals and students. These conversations have led to additional courses such as Ethics in Advertising/Public Relations (COMM 417), Client/Agency Relations (COMM 427), Graphic

Design (COMM 468), and a course focused on American Advertising Federation's national competition (COMM 425) (Mulvihill, 2012). While the College has also introduced new courses and programs to fit the growing need of social media, data analyst, and entertainment experts in the public relations industry, students may not know how these courses pertain to their future career goals. By not realizing which opportunities at Penn State possess the most value to their future ambitions, students could unintentionally forego critical skills and experiences that may help them excel in their early career.

### **The Purpose of this Research Project**

Existing research finds a tense relationship among practitioners and higher education professors.

Although formal, university-based public relations education has evolved for more than half a century, there appears to be a huge disconnect between what universities are providing and what those who practice public relations want (Wright & J.V. Turk, 2007, p. 586).

In later research Wright cited three reasons. First, most public relations programs fall under a subset of a larger communications category rather than an individual major. Second, discourse seldom occurs between educators and practitioners about curriculum design. And lastly, even when curriculum discussion takes place, the sampling includes a repetitive or limited sample of professionals who support public relations education rather than challenge it. The dearth of debate leads to a slower rate of change in educational institutions than in the professional realm (Wright, 2011, p. 246). Consequently graduates have to learn more on the job, even after intensive study. Therefore, it's important to interview professionals who find strengths and weaknesses within public relations curriculums. Without this input, professional programs may not serve their students to their best abilities.

To remain a top public relations program, the College of Communications holds high aspirations.

The College seeks to be recognized as the largest, most comprehensive, best-balanced, student centered, ACEJMC-accredited program in the country — one that emphasizes professional preparation of undergraduates; one that provides a blend of technique and conceptual courses; one that operates an academically rigorous graduate program; one that pushes internship experiences for its students; and one that insists upon scholarly, professional and creative productivity from its faculty (Hardin, 2013, p. 14).

In efforts to help the College serve the needs of students in their professional development, an in-depth interview study contacted Penn State alumni with degrees in advertising/public relations, public relations option. Research participants identified a specialty with the help of a moderator and answered questions inquiring about their education and early career. Additionally, participants provided feedback on curriculum ideas and mentoring scenarios. With these insights, this research project hopes to contribute applicable recommendations for administrators, students, alumni and student organizations.

Recommendations for students outline the most relevant, available courses or other educational opportunities to build the most valuable experience within different public relations disciplines. Recommendations for administration, alumni and student organizations offer practical ideas to resolve perceived gaps in public relations education. Inspired by the Penn State community's dedication to students, this research project wishes to acknowledge the College of Communication's commitment by continuing its work.

## CHAPTER 2 Literature Review

### **The History of Public Relations Education**

Public relations publications and practitioners find the profession and its history difficult to define. The myriad roles of public relations professionals today, whether managing communication between an organization and its publics or preparing a speech for another person, have been performed throughout history without an established job title. Furthermore, whether surrounding its beginnings or discussing its future, debates on public relations education also exists.

In 1920 Joseph P. Wright, a University of Illinois professor, introduced the first university-level public relations course titled Publicity Techniques. Three years later, Edward Bernays taught the first course with the word “public relations” in the title at New York University. Bernays’ course covered the theories, principles, practices and ethics behind the emerging profession (Bernays, 1965, p. 788). Although the University scheduled the course under the School of Commerce and Finance, Bernays was considered a lecturer in journalism. Bernays “advocated that public relations education should be based in a separate school or department at a university and not be part of some other academic unit such as journalism, business or speech-communication (Wright, 2011, p. 239).” While research points toward a rivalry among scholars between as to which man can claim to teach the first public relations course, the two professors shared similar motives (Wright, D.K. & Turk, J.V., 2007, p. 239).

Both Wright and Bernays figured that teaching public relations would work toward legitimizing the role and profession of public relations. Bernays thought that teaching the course would add credibility to public relations counsel, a coined job title that attempted to replace press

agent. Wright also conveyed similar thinking, “I thought if more people learned that an honest publicity man- at least in the educational area- dished out news and not propaganda, the climate for my work might be improved” (Cutlip, 1994, p. 220). Wright even disclosed that his fellow faculty had a suspicion toward the nature of public relations, which thus extended to the course (Cutlip, 1994, p. 222). Nevertheless, an understanding that public relations professionals must work toward the good of the profession still exists today. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Member Code of Ethics states the intent “To build respect and credibility with the public for the profession of public relations” (Public Relations Society of America, 2015c). In this mindset, both Wright and Bernays did public relations for public relations by adding clout to the profession through implementing courses at higher-education institutions.

While the early 1920s marked the formalization of public relations education, only a few books referenced public relations professions and roles at this time (Bernays, 1965, p. 785). An overall dismissal of public relations, in the professional and educational realms, existed. Bernays believed it was not until 1945 that public relations became an established profession (Bernays, 1965, p. 783).

Bernays recognized that incentives could encourage more social change in universities and colleges. So awards for higher learning institutions intended to promote an interest in public relations. Three students representing Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, New York University and Western Reserve University received awards for research and thesis work. Bernays confidently asserted awards “stimulated interest in public relations at other colleges and universities (Bernays, 1965, p. 790).” Just one year later, Boston University offered a Master of Science as the first American university with a degree in public relations (Wright, 2011, p. 240). These pioneer schools typically placed public relations schools within a Journalism or Mass

Communications College. The exception was Boston University, which created a separate Public Relations College but gradually transitioned to a general College of Communication.

### **The Scope of Public Relations Education**

Bernays teamed with Doris Fleischman to develop a survey regarding public relations education at universities. In 1937, the survey reported 31 schools with public relations programs. Ten years later, research found 47 public relations-titled courses offered by (at least) 30 schools. By 1956, there were 14 public relations majors available and 136 public relations-titled courses (Heath, 2013, p. 731). In 1966, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication formally created the public relations division in the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (Heath, 2013, p. 731). Then in 1986, an Ohio State professor proposed creating the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) to gather, inspire and prepare students pursuing careers in the field (Heath, 2013, p. 731).

As of February 2015, there are 324 PRSSA chapters, compared with 260 in 2006. The increase in chapters demonstrates a growth in public relations studies at higher-level education institutions. Chapter eligibility requires that schools must have a four-year baccalaureate program that is either regionally or nationally accredited. Additionally, colleges must prove the existence of five public relations courses: Introduction to Public Relations, Public Relations Writing and Production, Public Relations Research, Public Relations Strategy and Implementation (e.g. Case Problems, Campaigns Course), and a Supervised Public Relations Experience (Internship).

Then in 1989 PRSA established a voluntary accreditation program called the Certification in Education for Public Relations. The independent review and endorsement for

college and university curriculums certifies that the program has been approved by the PRSA standards (Heath, 2013, p. 6). The society also offers an accreditation program for individual professionals. The society also offers an accreditation program for individual professionals. PRSA recommends the Accredited in Public Relations (APR) program to professionals with five or more years of industry practice (Public Relations Society of America, 2015b). The APR test comprises 30 percent researching, planning, implementing and evaluating programs, 15 percent ethics and law, 15 percent communication models and theories, 10 percent business law literacy, 10 percent management skills and leadership, 10 percent issue management and crisis communication, 5 percent media relations, 2 percent history and practice of public relations, 2 percent using information technology effectively and 1 percent advanced communication skills (Universal Accreditation Board, 2015).

These accreditations are necessary neither for a school to have a PRSSA chapter nor for a professional to belong to the society. However, while PRSA is a notable force in the industry, additional historic educational bodies helped shape the public relations curriculum. Two organizations largely guide standards for public relations education: the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE), which offers recommendation, and the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC), which provides accreditation.

### **Public Relations Education Recommendations and Accreditations**

Since 1975 the Commission on Public Relations Education has provided educational recommendations at both college/university and professional levels. The Commission has published two reports on undergraduate curriculum. These reports receive funding from prominent organizations like the PRSA, Institute for Public Relations, Arthur W. Page Society

and the Scripps Howard Foundation. The more recent report affirmed the same five-course core requirements for the public relations major as outlined in 1999:

- Introduction to Public Relations (including theory, origin and principles)
- Public Relations Research, Measurement and Evaluation
- Public Relations Writing and Production
- Supervised work experience in public relations (internship)
- An additional public relations course in law and ethics, planning and management, case studies or campaigns (Turk, J.V., & Commission on Public Relations Education, 2006)

An outline that hasn't changed in seven years demonstrates that there is little discussion or dispute about the core curriculum from this body and the involved professionals and societies.

In 1987, the Public Relations Division of the Association Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication formed the Commission on Undergraduate Public Relations Education in co-sponsorship with 24 other organizations including: PRSA, Institute for Public Relations, the International Association of Business Communicators, the International Public Relations Association, the National Communication Association, and the International Communication Association. The bodies supported a curriculum with at least half of the courses serving a liberal arts education and a quarter of public relations specific courses. Consequently, schools with a liberal arts discipline would follow these accrediting standards. The ACEJMC provides curriculum guidelines that could apply to any concentration within mass communications.

According to the website, the accrediting body requires that the programs teach to:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.

- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world (Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, 2013).

Whereas the ACEJMC shares more general guidelines for accreditation, the CPRE outlines minimum requirements and additional courses for the ideal public relations curriculum. While both bodies receive endorsements by professional societies and organizations, only the ACEJMC has accrediting capabilities for university-level programs.

### **The Public Relations Student**

A penchant for writing inspires students to pursue a degree in journalism mass communications. Of the graduates who were asked the reasoning behind studying journalism/communication, one quarter of respondents said it was because they “enjoy writing” (Lee, 2013, p. 54). Then, the following five responses reasoned: having an interest in media/communications in general (15.9 percent), having a specific interest in major (14.4 percent), desiring a broad education/ variety in work (13.1 percent), wanting to be benefit society/ make a difference (10.8 percent), and possessing social skills/being a people person

(10.6 percent) (Becker, L. B., Vlad, T., & Simpson, H. A., 2014, p. 54). All of these answers share motives from a personal interest or innate characteristic, rather than being motivated by money or status. The public relations field values interpersonal, organizational, problem-solving, speaking and writing skills (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). The nature of assignments involves project management, working with design, and communicating or teaching people (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). However, the gender of students does play an interesting role in their professional development.

The field of public relations attracts more women than men. Of bachelor degree recipients in journalism and mass communications, 33.2 percent of women looked toward public relation department type work compared to 17.8 percent of men (Becker, L. B., Vlad, T., & Simpson, H. A., 2014, p. 74). However, the “feminization of public relations” has complex beginnings and consequences. In the 1980s, women began holding more public relations jobs. This hiring practice was largely influenced by affirmative action requirements to employ more women and minorities. In 2013, women made up 73-85 percent of the public relations industry (Heath, 2013, p. 339). Nevertheless, men hold more executive public relations positions than women. Women experience barriers that exist in other careers, including “family obligations, stereotyping of feminine characteristics, and stigmas against technical work” (Heath, 2013, p. 338). So while women dominate the classroom and lower-level jobs, the men hold more senior-level official roles.

### **Employment and Public Relations Education**

The most current edition of the University of Georgia’s Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication offers employment charts studying public relations students. After

completing a Bachelor's degree in public relations, the peak of employment was in 1998 when 84.2 percent of graduates found full-time work and only 7.3 percent of graduates were unemployed. In 2013, 68 percent of graduates found full-time work and 13 percent were unemployed. Overtime there has been no steady increase in full-time work to replace part-time positions or unemployment. While this competitive job market may value a public relations degree (rather than an alternative degree) when pursuing a communications career, there is no research to confirm this hypothesis. However, students majoring in mass communication fields (journalism, telecommunications, advertising, public Relations) have been pursuing more jobs within the communications work since 2008 as non-communications work after graduation decreases. This could demonstrate that communications-related work has a higher demand in recent years.

In 2012, Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 229,100 jobs for the entry-level public relations specialist (also called communications specialists and media specialists), with a median salary of \$54,170. In the description, the report states, “public relations specialists typically need a bachelor’s degree in public relations, journalism, communications, English, or business” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). An annual PR Newsweek survey also found the public relations specialist median salary at \$55,000 (Daniels, 2015, p. 30). However, graduates do not often land specialist positions after graduation. Instead, they may find themselves in post-grad internships or other stepping-stone positions. For example, account coordinators are also considered entry-level, but have a median salary of \$35,000 (Daniels, 2015, p. 30). Above an account coordinator is an assistant account executive, with a median salary of \$38,000. These median salaries require entry-level public relations professionals to seek promotions and growth opportunities to find a more substantial pay, especially if living in expensive cities.

The public relations manager position is grouped with fundraising managers. “Public relations managers plan and direct the creation of material that will maintain or enhance the public image of their employer or client” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). In 2013, a public relations manager’s median annual salary was \$98,700. There are about 62,000 employees with sampled job titles like “Account Executive, Account Manager, Account Supervisor, Business Development Director, Communications Director, Community Relations Director, Director of Public Relations, Public Affairs Director, Public Relations Director, or Public Relations Manager (PR Manager)” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Similar to the public relations specialists, important public relations skills remain consistent and job growth remains at an average pace of 12-13 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

### **The Future of Public Relations Education**

While the 2013 edition of Lee’s survey did not include enrollment numbers for public relations, Wright made his own assumptions. Using information from the results and limitations of a survey led by Lee Becker in 2002, Wright estimated that there are about 35,000 students majoring public relations, when his research published in 2011 (Wright, 2011, p. 242). Wright recognized that despite this large and probably growing number of students, a degree in public relations is not required in the United States in order to practice. Wright then agrees with U.S. Steel’s former Chief Public Relations Officer in stating that, “Public relations will never reach the status of a profession as long as people can get into the field and prosper without having completed a fairly rigorous course of study in the field” (Wright, 2011, p. 243).

Prominent professionals and organizations like PRSA and the Commission for Public Relations Education consistently announce that hiring professionals continue to value public relations education as a necessary step to advance the field. But in order to do so, potential

employers must show a preference toward public relations degrees when making hiring decisions. And in order for existing programs to remain relevant, Colleges must produce driven graduates that can attest to the value in their Alma Mater.

### **Research Questions**

A review of the literature on public relations education and industry leads to the following research questions:

RQ1: How do current professionals value in their Penn State public relations education?

RQ2: How could current public relations students prepare for professional success during their academic career?

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Method**

The broad and exploratory nature of the two research questions determined the methodology of this study. The interview method allowed the moderator to inquire, listen and expand on responses to alumni. Interviews produced a more in-depth study than would have been possible with a survey. The long interview “gives the investigator an agile instrument with which to capture how the respondent sees and experiences the world” (McCracken, 1988, p. 66). The research project gave participants a platform to reflect on their academic careers as professionals. After reaching data saturation, meaning interview responses began repeating, the moderator ceased interviews within the saturated category. The Pennsylvania State University Institutional Review Board approved of the study, including the sample target, recruitment communication, recording and transcribing processes.

#### **Sample**

Only Penn State alumni with degrees in advertising/public relations, public relations option, were considered for the interview. Because of the focus on curriculum design and professional experience, alumni with degrees in advertng/public relations, advertising option, alumni with other College of Communications’ majors, and people from other colleges were excluded. The initial, purposive sample originated from the researcher’s network. After each interview concluded, alumni were asked to either reference potential participants by phone or email. From here, a snowball sample ensued. This eventually resulted in 16 in-depth interviews between January and March 2015. Interviewees were given a participant number, according to

the chronological order of interview dates, for organizational and confidential purposes (Davis, 2014, p. 27).

**Table 1 Participant Descriptions**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>	<b>Specialty</b>	<b>Graduation Year</b>
Participant 1	1/29/2015	Social/Digital Media	2012
Participant 2	2/5/2015	Consumer Marketing	2012
Participant 3	2/12/2015	Social/Digital Media	2013
Participant 4	2/16/2015	Media Relations	2010
Participant 5	2/16/2015	Media Relations	2014
Participant 6	2/16/2015	Consumer Marketing	2011
Participant 7	2/18/2015	Consumer Marketing	2012
Participant 8	2/23/2015	Consumer Marketing	2012
Participant 9	2/25/2015	Media Relations	2014
Participant 10	3/2/2015	Consumer Marketing	2014
Participant 11	3/4/2015	Social/Digital Media	2014
Participant 12	3/17/2015	Social/Digital Media	2014
Participant 13	3/17/2015	Media Relations	2012
Participant 14	3/18/2015	Consumer Marketing	2012
Participant 15	3/18/2015	Social/Digital Media	2012

## **Specialty Selection**

Working with the moderator, every participant identified a public relations specialty to focus the interview. The moderator and participant identified the specialty by previous/current job titles or through a discussion about typical work assignments or confidence on subject matter. Edelman, a public relations firm, inspired the original list of specialties. As the world's largest public relations firm in terms of annual gross income, Edelman lists expertise in 34 distinct public relations categories divided into six specialties. The list of possible specialties includes business and social purpose, consumer marketing, corporate, crisis and risk, digital, public affairs (Edelman, 2015). By using these specialties for guidance, the moderator and participants were able to identify a single discipline for each interview.

## **Communication with Recruitment**

After a participant shared a potential participant's email address, the moderator approached potential participants via email. While thank you emails were often tailored to the conversations with the participant, contact largely followed the outline in Appendix A.

## **Interviews**

The moderator conducted each phone interview following the same 16-question interview guide. The guide divided the interview into three sections: general information, education and early career, and curriculum design. Questions were phrased in a "grand tour" manner, with probing questions to encourage more thorough answers. While conversation would often change the order and phrasing of the research questions, participants were all led to discuss their

academic and professional careers to provide feedback on the curriculum and industry. To see the interview guide, please visit Appendix B.

### **Recording and Transcribing Processes**

Before beginning the interview, the moderator asked each participant for permission to record the conversation and continue the interview using speakerphone mode. The speakerphone feature allowed the moderator to record the conversations using an iPad app, AudioMemos (Free). After the interview was transcribed, the moderator deleted the recording.

Interviews were transcribed using Google Documents for its frequent auto save feature. To ensure confidentiality, the moderator used codenames. Codenames comprised of the interviewee's surname initial, public relations specialty and date of interview. When transcribing, verbal fillers were deleted unless to suggest a pause in a participant's thinking. When participants trailed off or restarted a thought, an ellipsis was used. If participants mentioned a particular Penn State employee in their interview, the employee name was replaced with XXX to protect their identity. Transcriptions did not begin until introducing the interview and ended when the moderator stated, "this concludes the interview." Participants' answers were italicized for quick identification. To find transcripts, please refer to Appendix C.

## CHAPTER 4 Findings

### Appreciating Penn State's College of Communications

The first research question asked how current practitioners value their Penn State public relations education. Participants identified moments of preparedness and unpreparedness in their early career. Almost every participant expressed gratitude for the College's emphasis on group work and writing in the curriculum, which they said resembles the industry. Even though course names and numbers become irrelevant, participants mentioned influential employees. Many alumni referenced a helpful professor, adviser or administrator during the interview. Participant 3 reflected on one professor's ability to replicate the industry's work environment in the classroom.

It was very demanding and that's how my job is now. I think it prepared me for so many reasons. There was an assignment due every day and that prepared me to meet deadlines and prioritize tasks.

Participant 16 also identified the collaborative environment as one way her public relations education prepared her for work.

It's a big school and you're working with a lot of different personalities. That's how it is when you go off and work in the real world. You could get along with people, you could not, but you have to get your ideas together and make your client happy or whomever you're working for happy. So you come up with an end result that's good. I think that the Penn State education really values that since all of teachers want us to do well. They were always there to make sure that we did.

A couple of interviewees stated that their public relations degree set them apart at their communications job. When asked if a public relations education prepared Participant 1 for work, the participant answered,

Oh yeah! I mean, in every possible way. I think one of the main things that sticks out is that I wouldn't have learned how to write concisely without my classes at Penn State.

And that's really critical for working in media. I see a lot of people who are new to public relations. They didn't study it in college but seek careers in it. Maybe they studied English or something—but their writing is not concise.

Participant 8 also confirmed the benefits of learning public relations writing methods before pursuing a public relations job.

When you end up in an agency especially, you'll realize that not everyone has a major that pertains to the job they're doing. So I ended up being the only person on my team who knew how to write a press release. And it wasn't a big part of my job because I was on the social media team, and that's not what I had to do on a daily basis, but that skill came through for a client when their team was bogged down with fashion week and their team needed help with some of the smaller press releases.

### **Expressing Interest in Broader Experiences**

Many alumni expressed interest in courses, minors or majors in Penn State's Smeal College of Business. Alumni remembered dual marketing and public relations degrees limitations, which also exist for dual majors and minors within the College of Communications. Yet no alumni could not identify or explain the reasoning. Participant 6 stated,

I think the College of Communications and Business College need to find a better way to work together in a more efficient manner. I had this experience and I have heard similar experiences that... people would start as a public relations major can't major in marketing, but people who start in marketing are able to add PR as a major. And I think the dual majors work really well together. And I was frustrated that I wasn't able to do that because of some random rule. It didn't make sense to me.

When asked about helpful major and minor combinations, most participants answered that a business minor has the most to offer. Participant 10 said,

I don't think you can double major in advertising and PR, so maybe if you could double major in marketing and PR. I don't know if you can do that, but if you can you should do it. And if you can't, then take as many marketing classes as you can in a business minor. Because that really helps with well roundedness and I wish I took a few more marketing classes than I did.

Participant 13 also acknowledged a potentially helpful inter-College major,

I think that if it were possible, and this is based on the student and a lot of different criteria but if it was possible for them to double major in PR and journalism, I think that would be really helpful. I think that given what I already said that we don't get a ton of media relations, the best next thing is to understand the mindset of a journalist.

### **Desiring Job Versatility**

Many alumni described a desire to incorporate their writing and social skills into a communications profession, which is reflective of existing research shared in the literature review. However, alumni came to the decision in different ways. Some took Introduction to Advertising (COMM 320) and Introduction to Public Relations (COMM 370). Others made a decision after an influential club or internship. However, while all of these participants graduated with advertising/public relations degrees, more than half began at Penn State as journalism majors. Participant 11 reflected,

I actually started as a broadcast journalism major. At the end of my freshman year I was kind of wondering about how good the field was and how likely it was that I was going to get a position doing exactly what I wanted to do. So instead of sticking with that I decided to broaden my options and at one point I thought about going to PR. It's an open field and there's a lot of things you can do with it. And in the end if I wanted to go back to the broadcast area it would still be possible with PR. PR gives you the freedom to do whatever you want.

Participant 12 shared,

I originally went in broadcast journalism and after taking a few classes in that I realized I wanted to be behind the camera gathering the information, spotting the story, things like that. I didn't love journalism so I took the intro to PR class. I learned everything you can do with PR and I realized that's what I wanted to do. I just really enjoy working with media and being able to create and promote something. I think there's something really exciting about it

While many interviewees referenced the versatility of a public relations degree other cited benefits like job opportunity and salary. Participant 6 stated,

I started in journalism, but after a semester of getting some experience, working at the Collegian, taking a couple intro classes, I realized the job market was pretty lacking. And I didn't want to work for four years and have to do something else to get a job. It sounds

very “Debbie downer” but it was the truth in that day. And I knew I wanted to do something in communications. And after spending all of that time writing, I realized that I was missing the people piece of it. So I switched to PR because I wanted to relate to people and communities.

Participant 3 shared,

I originally started out in journalism and then I guess you can say I was kind of influenced by the job market and the pay wasn't very good at the time so I switched to public relations. At the end of it, I was glad I switched. I really enjoyed public relations a lot more than I think I would have enjoyed journalism.

### **Feeling Unprepared for the Job Market**

Despite finding job versatility, alumni felt unprepared for the job market and job search.

Half of the sample went to complete postgraduate internships and fellowships, not full-time jobs.

After the final interview question Participant 6 added,

I don't know how to approach this... but I when I graduated I had high morale, I had awesome experience in PR but getting a job in PR was the hardest and most discouraging thing ever. [...] Somewhere along the curriculum someone should set an expectation of what the job market is like. There are a ton of PR agencies that are going to hire you as an intern and make you work six to seven months before hiring you with a substantial salary.

Participant 9 also spoke on the topic.

Well I am probably one of the many graduates, not just from Penn State, that wasn't really sure where I was going. I knew I was coming back home to New York. I started applying to a couple of things. I really wanted to go into sports, on the organization side. So working for either the New York Giants, MLB, something of that nature... But everything that I was applying to either didn't pan out or it had openings in ticket sales. Which I didn't really want to do because I knew it wouldn't give me experience in PR or communications.

Although alumni could identify classes, skills and professors that prepared them for the industry, a few participants acknowledged the importance of on-the-job training. Participant 4 explained,

Media relations is a large part of any public relations role. Even if you're in consumer marketing, public affairs, you need to be able to get on the phone and pitch the idea quickly. And that wasn't really emphasized in my courses. Maybe it's because it's a difficult thing to teach someone. A lot of the skills you learn in public relations are more on-the-job training like basic skills like writing, critical thinking, and all these different things. I'm assuming it's hard to build those skills into a curriculum but it would be very valuable.

Participant 13 shared a similar thinking about media relations.

It's just such an integral piece of this job. It's a shame that there hasn't really been a way anyone has thought of to give that experience. For example, career centers hold mock interviews, so I think that for PR majors there needs to be mock pitching.

Many participants stated that a media relations course should be created, or possibly even required. Participant 13 stated,

I would make a focused media relations class. I think that there is a semesters-worth of things you need to know about true media relations, and how to pitch to journalists. Because writing a pitch is not the hard part

Participant 10 also described the value of a media relations course.

I think it would be beneficial if there was a pitching class. Because in PR, you're doing a lot of pitching, but pitches vary so much depending on who you're reaching out to. And you have to tweak each pitch individually and you'll spend a lot of time on them. And a lot of people will just send a mass pitch out, but you won't get the same results. So it would be helpful to have a whole media relations class with pitching being a huge part of it.

Participant 4 also added,

I think I got a lot out of the program the way it is. So I think you really need to be an excellent writing, but I think there should be a pitching course. I think that's really important. People need to learn how to take really complex ideas and turn them into the shaved elevator speech. You need to do that quickly, on a daily basis, on the phone, to a complete stranger. And if people had those skills before they leave, they would have a leg up on competition.

When describing how they felt unprepared, interviewees were often sympathetic to the College's restraints for teaching hands-on practices. However, on-the-job training wasn't

exclusive to media relations. Alumni also felt unprepared for budgeting and networking. When asked about additional valuable courses or lessons, Participant 4 stated,

A budgeting class. When you start you have no idea how much your company is making, you're told "your billing rate is this much, your senior's billing rate is this much, we're charging the client this much," but you don't really understand the big picture. It's not really your boss's job to explain it to you all on your first day. So if I could go back I would want to take something on how you build a program for a client.

Participant 14 agreed.

I would say they should really have a timeline and budget building class. Find out how long it takes an agency and how to bill. Timelines and estimates based on client budgets would be a big one.

Participant 9 felt unprepared for networking, especially in terms of finding a job.

Just coming from New York and going to a school really not too far from State College... there wasn't enough done to help us connect with alumni in the city. So I would just say the networking side rather than education side is where it would probably need to be bumped up.

### **Preparing for Success in Public Relations**

The second research question asked how could current public relations students prepare for professional success during their academic career. The research project initially aimed to identify skillsets specific to different public relations specialties. However, most alumni identified time management as the most crucial skill for the public relations industry as a whole. Professionals attributed time management skills to student organizations like The Daily Collegian Business and News Divisions (Penn State's student-run newspaper) and Happy Valley Communications (Penn State's student-run PR firm). However, participants' believed that their superiors generally valued time management skills over a specific extracurricular experience.

Participant 7 held three extracurricular activity positions while a full-time student and reflected,

I think that it was more about juggling different responsibilities all at once that helped me with my current work. When I was interviewed for the job it was very important to my

boss that I was self-sufficient. I could do multiple things and multi-task and handle things under pressure.

Whereas Participant 7 applied time management to in-house public relations work, Participant 14 applied it to the agency setting when asked to identify an important skill.

In an agency, you have to bill your time to your clients. No matter how much work you have to get done, you have to do it in the allotted time. So time management is huge, being able to balance multiple things at once.

While time management proved to be imperative across different public relations disciplines, participants also identified more unique skills for each specialty. The snowball sample touched on three specialties: media relations, consumer marketing, and social/digital media. Each specialty had distinct roles identified by participants.

### **Preparing for Success in Media Relations**

Media relations work includes drafting press releases, pitching stories to the press, gaining news coverage, and building journalist contacts. The participants mentioned these roles then identified organization and professionalism as critical skills. Participant 9 stated,

It's so important for building media contacts and following up. It's the key to maintaining those relationships. And when you're a junior account executive or entry-level person, you're really the one that's looked at to send those minor press releases and pitches. So if you're not organized to schedule, follow up, and push whatever news is coming from the client you're really not able to gain that coverage in those glossier, top-tier publications.

Participant 13 shared,

I think that time management and organization are so important, in any field of communications but especially PR. Timeliness is everything. You can lose chances to get amazing news stories in an hour if the story that you're trying to sell to a journalist is something that can be spun by a competitor or another relevant industry, and not just your product.

Participant 13 continued,

I think that media relations, as I said, is so much about developing relationships that I think that any media relations position you need to be able to interact with people at a professional but still efficient level. And that's honestly one of the most important things to value in media relations.

Participant 5 mentioned professionalism in writing,

I definitely think being professional is one aspect, but in a way that you communicate in an email. I know when I get an email for certain requests that are media related that the way you speak to someone should always be as professional as if they are a senior executive at a company.

### **Preparing for Success in Consumer Marketing**

Consumer marketing work includes researching and targeting a consumer, promoting a brand, and creating product-related initiatives. Participants in this discipline referred to these responsibilities when identifying client-interaction, collaboration and creativity as important skills in their specialty. Participant 6 stated,

I feel like a lot of times with PR, it's really easy to just crank out pitches and write stuff, but being an actual human being is really important. Having a personality and the ability to talk about anything with anyone. That kind of trait, I guess you can't really learn that, but it's important with marketing/public relations especially on the consumer marketing end. Because you'll always be put in situations that you'll be in a networking dinner, or hosting a luncheon, or having a meeting with a bunch of doctors, that's kind of what I do right now. They might have something they want to talk about. So things like that, being able to kind of step away from the computer screen and go speak and represent yourself and your brand.

Participant 2 also mentioned client interaction.

It really does depend if you're at a firm versus in-house. But all day long I'm talking to different brands, trying to juggle what this person is looking for compared to this person, then comparing proposals, different aspects of that. So it's a combination of multi-tasking and interface with the client.

Participant 14 stressed creativity.

You have to be a little more innovative and very open-minded because people are going to come with crazy ideas to you and you will be like "that's never going to happen." But you have to figure out how to make it happen. Especially if it's your boss saying "this is what we're doing."

Participant 10 agreed and included teamwork.

It's really important to be creative and do ideas that haven't done before. And when you're in a new environment and working with people with different backgrounds, connectivity is crucial in creating a new idea for a new campaign that will be successful.

### **Preparing for Success in Digital/Social Media**

As identified by participants, digital/social media work encompasses content strategy, creation and engagement. Social/digital media professionals uniquely emphasized the importance of environmental awareness and engagement. Participant 15 recalled a professor's advice to read the newspaper every day. Participant 15 then related that practice to social/digital media.

You have to know what people are talking about regarding those trends and how to keep up with the conversation. So it's all about staying in tune and relating your brand to the world, when possible.

Participant 16 added,

It's important to know what's going around in the world and around you, especially in a PR or ad career. That's something I find at work. If I don't know what's going on in the world, I feel out of it.

Environmental awareness also extends into the idea of engagement. Participant 11 explained,

You always want to be engaging your followers, your users, and your audience. It's your job to make sure that they know what is going on and know the message you're trying to portray. And I think that's really important for your brand. You need to engage your audience and you have to know your audience to do that.

As stated by Participant 11, engagement requires an understanding of the audience.

Participant 1 extends on this idea relating to the customer service aspect of digital/social media work.

You have to be able to communicate with everyday people who are commenting on a Facebook post or tweeting at you. And in other communications fields you're dealing with journalists or CEOs, not the general public. But in social media you have to be able to deal with the general public and that can be kind of challenging.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Discussion**

#### **Appreciating Penn State's College of Communications**

The College of Communications has an academic mission; it is not a vocational school. Nevertheless the College prepared many Bachelor of Arts graduates for communications careers, including these 16 alumni. With this praise in mind, the following recommendations serve to contribute to the College's efforts to improve students' academic careers.

#### **Expressing Interest in Business Experience**

Most interviews demonstrated a misunderstanding about the College's limitations in terms of dual majors and minors. Professionals expressed the value of a dual-major or minor in marketing, business, advertising and journalism. However, as a controlled major, the advertising/public relations major does not offer these combinations. While the College explains inter-College and intra-College limitations as early as Accepted Students Day for incoming freshman, clearly people forget or misunderstand the reasoning. As it turns out, students are limited on where they can find this information. For example, the College of Communications' advising FAQ webpage informs readers that students cannot pursue a minor within the College of Communications without providing a reason to this limitation (The Pennsylvania State University, 2013a). Administration should consider addressing these issues more consistently or making this information accessible online so students and alumni do not feel that the college is limiting their education's potential for unknown reasons. Furthermore, planning College of Communications and Smeal College of Business partner events may expose students to more business and management lessons.

### **Desire for Job Versatility**

During their time as students and reflecting as alumni, interviewees admired the public relations degree's flexibility. The College should continue to incorporate this benefit in College recruitment events and advising meetings. Student organizations can also publicize different ways alumni have utilized their public relations education. This may continue to inspire students to pursue a communications degree.

### **Feeling Unprepared for the Job Market**

Alumni expressed an early understanding of the job market as a traditional journalism student, which often caused a switch to public relations. However, a couple of participants felt blindsided by the public relations industry's postgraduate opportunities. Conducting an anonymous survey for graduates about post-graduate positions and salaries, then making this information available to students, may help students informatively approach the job market. The survey can take place a year after graduation to gather information about the job search and promotion timelines. Then, this information can be given to students visiting the career services office or distributed to professors to share findings with students.

After working in the industry for a year or two, alumni should consider returning to campus to share their early career experiences. This would give students the opportunity to ask active practitioners questions about the job search, recruitment process and working life. Also, by reflecting both moments of success and doubt, students can develop a realistic expectations about entry-level public relations jobs. To participate in this sort of event, alumni can visit past

professors' classes or partner with student organizations. For example, Penn State PRSSA and AdClub host a Life After Carnegie panel.

If alumni cannot visit campus, they can blog about their experience and share writings on social media pages like LinkedIn's Penn State College of Communications Ad/PR network. Alumni and administrators can also consider teaming up to develop a weekly column by alumni, which could be promoted by the College of Communications social media accounts to expose students to this perspective. Since public relations professionals have strong writing skills and seek to build their online presence, alumni may welcome this opportunity.

### **Preparing for Success in Public Relations**

Student organizations and the College of Communications should look for opportunities to fill perceived gaps in the curriculum found in this interview. Many alumni expressed feeling unprepared in budgeting experiences and networking events. Therefore, when promoting College events, such as the College of Communications' Etiquette Dinner, the College should also try to include a networking incentive for communications students. The value of meeting peers across different majors may not be apparent, but may prove helpful, to advertising/public relations and journalism students. The College can encourage dialogue and LinkedIn requests at these events. Furthermore familiarizing students with networking during college may encourage them to participate in alumni networking events after graduation.

The Lawrence G. Foster chapter of PRSSA could prove to be pivotal in addressing concerns voiced in these interviews. PRSSA could focus workshops and guest-speaking events on topics many entry-level alumni struggled to master. For example, leadership can reach out to alumni and ask them to help create realistic budgeting sheets (loosely based off of real, client

budgets but of course altered for confidentiality). Media relations practice can be in partnership with a journalism clubs like Penn State's Society of Professional Journalism or with The Daily Collegian staff members.

Alumni also stressed the importance of news reading habits and maintaining a social media presence. PRSSA can lead by example by tweeting industry-related news as well as timely stories to their followers. This could be a responsibility of the executive board when holding their weekly office hours. This would not only show students what types of articles they should be sharing, but also act as a curated news source for public relations trends.

Initially the research project aimed to create new recommended academic plans for students. However, Penn State plans on implementing new general education requirements by fall 2016 (Salinas, 2014). Changing rules about inter-College and intra-College minor options also present obstacles to this goal. Rather than offering an eight-semester guide, the following list of classes and skills have been identified or otherwise referenced as helpful for the three public relations disciplines while honoring the Colleges' scheduling restraints. Students can consider using these outlines when scheduling or incorporating skills in internship searches or cover letter applications.

### **Preparing for Success in Media Relations**

*Courses:* News Media Ethics (COMM 409), Internship (COMM 495), Interpersonal Communication (CAS 203), Persuasive Speaking (CAS 213)

*Skills to build and emphasize:* Building and maintaining relationships by staying organized and professional.

*Other recommended opportunities and tools to explore:* Cision, Critical Mention, Google Analytics, College of Communications etiquette dinners

### **Preparing for Success in Consumer Marketing**

*Courses:* Client/Agency Relations (COMM 427), Introduction to Business Information System (MIS 204), Introduction to Advertising (COMM 320), Introduction to Sociology (SOC 001)

*Skills to build and emphasize:* Interacting with clients, handling multiple projects at once, and understanding consumers/consumer research.

*Other recommended opportunities and tools to explore:* Photoshop, Microsoft Suite, Google AdWords, Codecademy, Simmons OneView

### **Preparing for Success in Social/Digital Media**

*Courses:* Photojournalism (COMM 269), Public Relations and Social Media (COMM 497C), Feature Writing (COMM 462), Cultural Aspects of the Mass Media (COMM 411)

*Skills to build and emphasize:* Showing a passion for the social media industry, news cycle and creative problem solving.

*Other recommended opportunities and tools to explore:* Hootsuite Certification, TweetDeck, WordPress, photography, and any other creative outlets

### **Limitations and Further Research**

While the sample provided insightful answers, it is not representative of the entire public relations profession. Only female alumni contributed to this research project, but this may be more reflective than it appears. More women than men study advertising/public relations at

Penn State, as well as other schools. Currently 555 women and only 100 men are scheduled in the public relations option (K. Kennedy, personal communication, April 7, 2015).

Additionally, participants only reflected on three types of public relations specialties. This may be a result from the industry hiring recent graduates for media relations, consumer marketing, and digital/social media roles. Future research could seek input from different graduation years and may find greater variance among public relations specialties for a more comprehensive study. Nevertheless a recent graduation date helped alumni recall their educational experiences. Additionally, these specialties set realistic job opportunities for College of Communications' graduates.

## **Conclusion**

An emphasis on writing and collaboration in the Penn State College of Communications' curriculum helped alumni not only complete work assignments, but also distinguish themselves amongst other college graduates. However, alumni needed on-the-job training to build media relations, budgeting and networking skills, which were underrepresented in the professional program. Participants also shared unique skills for specific public relations specialties and voiced discontent with minor and dual major limitations. After reflecting on these major themes, this research project offered practical recommendations to administrators, student organizations, alumni and students. To unite with the College, and their commitment to providing a rewarding academic experience, recommendations work within existing Bachelor of Arts requirements that have and will continue to mold successful graduates

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Communication with Recruitment**

#### **INTERVIEW REQUEST EMAIL**

Hello [name],

I am a Penn State Schreyer scholar contacting you today to request an interview as a part of my honors thesis. I am studying Penn State's public relations curriculum. I hope that by speaking with alumni in different communications specialties, I can develop academic plans for students pursuing specific career paths within the public relations industry. I have spoken to [reference/relationship] who suggested that you may be interested in helping with my research. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak with you over phone for about 15 minutes. The voluntary interview will be entirely anonymous. And if you are interested, I can share my findings with you in April.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Till

#### **REJECTION EMAIL**

Thank you [name] for getting back to me. I understand that you will not be able to participate. I hope you have a relaxing [week/weekend].

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Till

#### **CONFIRMATION EMAIL**

Thank you [name] for volunteering to participate in my interview. I imagine your industry experience and perspective as a Penn State alumn[us/ae] will be incredibly insightful. Please let me know a time when you are available to speak, as well as the best phone number to reach you at that time.

Thank you again for your help,

Jacqueline Till

**WITHDRAWAL EMAIL**

Hello [name],

I understand you no longer wish to participate in my interview. Thank you for updating me.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Till

**REMINDER EMAIL**

Hello [name],

I just wanted to confirm that you are still available to speak at [time] by calling [phone number]. If you are no longer available, I am happy to find a more convenient time.

Thank you,

Jacqueline Till

**RESCHEDULE EMAIL**

Thank you for updating me. I will now call [phone number] at [date/time].

I look forward to speaking with you then,

Jacqueline Till

**THANK YOU EMAIL**

Hello [name],

Thank you for finding the time to speak to me on [day of the week the interview took place]. You offered valuable advice pertaining to [PR specialty]. Working on my thesis has been a memorable experience, and it would not have been possible without such a supportive Penn State community. By speaking with alumni across different public relation specialties, I hope to make detailed academic plans for students with specific career goals within the communications industry. I intend to share my findings with the College of Communications, so please know that you have greatly helped not only me but many other Penn State students. I hope that you have a relaxing [week/weekend].

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Till

**FINDINGS EMAIL**

Hello [name],

When I spoke to you in [month], you mentioned that you would like me to share my research findings with you. Attached you will find my [executive summary/completed thesis]. I greatly appreciate your help throughout this entire process.

Best,

Jacqueline Till

## **APPENDIX B Interview Guide**

### **INTRODUCTION TO INTERVIEW**

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. I really appreciate you taking time out of your day to share your public relations knowledge and experiences.

First, I'd like to get some general information. Next, I'm going to ask you a few questions about your career, starting with your education at Penn State through your current work. Finally, I'll ask you to think about how you would mentor future students following a similar career path.

I just want to remind you that your responses to all of these questions will be confidential and you are welcome to skip any specific questions that you prefer not to answer.

### **I. GENERAL QUESTIONS**

Name

Graduation Year

Major(s)

Minor(s)

First job after graduation (title and company)

Current job (title and company)

PR SPECIALTY (area within public relations)

[Incorporate this answer throughout the interview]

### **II. EDUCATION/EARLY CAREER QUESTIONS**

1. Tell me about your decision to major in PR at Penn State?
  - a. When did you decide? Did you decide before coming to college?
  - b. Was there a certain class or professor?
  - c. Was there a specific skill set you were confident in building?
  - d. Were there any memorable experiences outside of school while you were a student?
2. When and why did you decide to pursue [PR SPECIALTY] specifically?
3. Tell me about a time you felt your education prepared you at work.

- a. Are there any other examples that stick out in your mind?
  - b. [If response to #3 was NOT public relations specific] Was there a time your public relations education, in particular, prepared you at work?
  - c. [If response to #3 was public relations specific] Was there a time your general education prepared you at work?
4. Can you describe a time when you felt you were unprepared for a public relations assignment?
  5. Can you describe a skill that [PR SPECIALTY] values more than another communications field?

### **III. CURRICULUM DESIGN**

1. If you were a mentor to an underclassman pursuing [PR SPECIALTY]:
  - a. What would you suggest to major in?
  - b. What would you suggest to minor in?
  - c. What additional, elective courses (within PR or across campus) would you suggest?
2. If you were mentoring an underclassman pursuing [PR SPECIALTY], what skill would you emphasize as the most important in fostering?
3. If you were designing a public relations concentration in [PR SPECIALTY], what types of courses would you make mandatory?
4. If given the opportunity to enroll in one additional PR class and one additional elective class today, what courses would you like to take and why?

### **ENDING TO INTERVIEW**

OK that concludes my interview. Thank you for your thoughtful responses. Do you have any questions for me?

## APPENDIX C Interview Transcripts

### Media Relations

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: S-Media Relations-2/16/2015*

Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today. Just to walk you through what we're going to be talking about...First, I'd like to get some general information. Then, I'm going to ask you a few questions about your career, starting with your education at Penn State through the work at your firm. Lastly, I'll ask you to think about how you would mentor future students following a similar career path in public relations. And I just want to remind you that your responses to all of these questions will be confidential and you can skip any specific questions that you prefer not to answer.

*Sounds good.*

Ok so what was your graduation year?

*2010*

And your major was public relations?

*Yes, I actually doubled major B.A. in public relations from the College of Communications and a B.S. in marketing from Smeal.*

Oh wow, I didn't even know you could do that.

*Oh, yeah. I was going to add that you have to start out as a Smeal major. That has to be your primary major, but you can pick up a second one. But they make that really hard. So it's not that common.*

Oh ok. So I'm guessing you didn't have any minors then?

*I had a minor in international business.*

Ok so what was your first job, the title and company, after graduation?

*First job I was an account executive at CooperKatz & Company located in New York.*

Ok and is that where you stayed until you transferred into a different career?

*Yeah that's where I was for three years.*

And so with this research project I'm hoping to identify your specialty within public relations then develop a curriculum plan for students pursuing that same kind of job. Do you know what I mean? Like specialty within public relations? Corporate communications, digital/social media, consumer marketing, crisis communications, social/business purpose...do you fit in any of those?

*Well that's challenging because the firm that I worked at was generalist so we didn't have a specialty in anything. Yeah, our clients kind of ran the gamut. We had real estate clients,*

*consumer products clients, we worked in healthcare, marketing and branding. We did everything. So I don't really have a specialty. Well, based on my skill set I worked mostly on media relations projects.*

Ok well what if I picked your brain about consumer marketing. Would that be ok? Because of your marketing background? Sorry! Figuring this out is the hardest part.

*Sure!*

Ok, so I'm just going to ask about your education a bit. What was your decision making process to major in PR?

*Well I really wanted to write. I wanted to be a journalist. But when I was applying to colleges in 2005, the journalism industry ... newspapers were going under, people were uncertain about the future of media. So, I thought that public relations was a good way to still have the opportunity to write but do it in a way that I could support myself and make money. So that's how I ended up in PR.*

Ok. So how did you decide to pursue the marketing route?

*Well, I thought that it was really important to have experience and expertise in more of the analytic and quantitative aspects of the business world. I think that the PR curriculum is great, but I really wanted a little bit more. I thought it was important that I take accounting and finance. With marketing there's also a lot of psychology behind it. And marketers are good at that sort of aspect. And I think the communications program touches on those things... but since I could have more in depth knowledge, I wanted to go into marketing.*

Ok so with your work at CooperKatz, can you think of a time your education prepared you for a particular assignment?

*Hm. That's a great question. How do I want to phrase this? I think that my COMM classes really prepared me well for presenting. Whether it was in an interview with my boss when I was trying to get the job, or I was really fortunate to go... Actually I think I told you my first position was account executive but it was actually account coordinator. Then I got promoted. As an account coordinator, you typically don't get to go on a lot of new business pitches. But the communications curriculum gives you a lot of experience with presentations, and I think that was an important part of my education that showed through on the job.*

Awesome. Do you remember a specific class that had a lot of presentations? Or was it kind of all of them?

*I have such a bad memory, that's why I recommended [future participant] because she has an excellent memory especially regarding the program. But I think the capstone class.*

Capstone class? Ok. Now can you think of a time you were unprepared for a public relations assignment. Like you were given a task and you didn't know how to do it?

*Well I think the ironic thing about me is that... I was a media relations person, which meant I was pitching story ideas to journalists. And you don't really get that kind of training in the College of Comm curriculum. I got that training outside of class because I was the Advertising Manager at The Daily Collegian. So I had to know how to cold call and teach my 30 staff members. Media relations is a large part of any public relations role. Even if you're in consumer marketing, public affairs, you need to be able to get on the phone and pitch the idea quickly. And that wasn't really emphasized in my courses. Maybe it's because it's a difficult thing to teach*

*someone. A lot of the skills you learn in public relations are more on-the-job training like basic skills like writing, critical thinking, and all these different things. I'm assuming it's hard to build those skills into a curriculum but it would be very valuable.*

Yeah definitely that's a good point. I've heard that response a couple of items. And I was wondering how you knew [previous participant]. I worked at the Collegian for two years and it's inspiring to hear about alumni success stories.

*Yeah I actually want to recommend someone else, [potential participant] who was the Business Manager and now does Corporate Communications for GE.*

Yeah I've been in touch with her earlier this year about her work and success, but thanks for bringing her to mind. Maybe I'll use your name to touch base with her again. But I'm going to actually focus in on media relations- you inspired me to dive more into that. So, what's a skill media relations values more than other communications fields.

*Ok! Um. I think it's also a difficult skill to teach but you kind of have to have a thick skin. You're getting on the phone all day every day. It's emotional intelligence. You're going to get on the phone and they're going to say no, hang up, tell you you're a fool, or whatever. Because a lot of times you're pitching these, sometimes, goofy things because it's what your client wants. And you know that this reporter isn't going to buy it but you're going to give it your best try. So that's an important skill. You get thrown to the wolves if you go into a media relations role and you're not properly trained. And if you don't have a really supportive work environment like I did you can get burned out fast. It's pretty emotionally draining, at least in media relations.*

Interesting, I can see that. So this last section is on curriculum design. If you were going to mentor an undergraduate student pursuing a job in media relations, what would you suggest to major and minor in?

*Well I don't regret my public relations degree. It's definitely helped where I was initially and where I am now. So I definitely recommend the PR major. But I don't know. If you can do two minors, but do business. It's really important to understand business, so minor in that. Business dictates how the world works. Then, I think that psychology or something related to understanding the way people think and make decisions is really important for someone who is working with clients all the time and pitching ideas to a diverse group of people.*

Great. And then were there any additional elective courses you remember taking at Penn State? Or that you think would be helpful for a student pursuing a job in media relations?

*Well I didn't have a lot of electives because my two majors ate up a lot my credits. But I think everyone is required to take public speaking, right? So that. And any type of elective that would build on that would be useful for anyone pursuing media relations. I don't know if there's advance speaking courses or presentation courses, but I would highly recommend that. No one likes it but it's valuable. It's really useful.*

Ok so kind of breaching off of that. If someone studied public relations with a concentration in media relations, what type of courses would you make mandatory?

*I think I got a lot out of the program the way it is. So I think you really need to be an excellent writing, but I think there should be a pitching course. I think that's really important. People need to learn how to take really complex ideas and turn them into the shaved elevator speech. You*

*need to do that quickly, on a daily basis, on the phone, to a complete stranger. And if people had those skills before they leave, they would have a leg up on competition. So a pitching class. That would be awesome.*

I love that idea. And earlier you mentioned quantitative skills. I know that you had your degree in business, but do you think PR majors should have to take some sort of math or analytic classes-more of that? Did you find that helpful?

*Yes. As far as like accounting, I don't see the point of that as long as you're able to handle your own budget. So, the business classes are definitely useful. But if they're more geared toward product management for instance, that would teach you how to work with a client budget then building your activities out of that. That would be an excellent way to be more on the quantitative side.*

So understanding how budgeting works with your client?

*Right, that would be more valuable than the traditional business classes. Also, the finance classes I took I found really interesting. But if you're pursuing a career in public relations and it's not going to be related to financial services, you don't need to understand the ins-and-outs of the stock market.*

Ok! Yeah, sorry you're just particularly unique because you have both majors and you're probably the only one I'll talk to with that so I had to focus on that!

*Oh, yeah.*

Well, this is kind of different for you because you're no longer in PR, right?

*Right.*

So I don't know if this is worth asking but... If you were given the opportunity to take one more public relations class and one more elective class, let's say this is at the end of your PR work, what would you take and why? Were there any holes in your education you would have wanted to go back and take a class in?

*Yeah some of the classes I'm taking now, in my public policy program, would also be useful for PR people. A budgeting class. When you start you have no idea how much your company is making, you're told "your billing rate is this much, your senior's billing rate is this much, we're charging the client this much," but you don't really understand the big picture. It's not really your boss's job to explain it to you all on your first day. So if I could go back I would want to take something on how you build a program for a client. I think that would be really great. And I think they touch on that in your capstone, your real world client has a budget that if they were going to implement your program, that's what you would work with. But a whole class could be dedicated just to that.*

Well awesome. Your answers were so helpful and thoughtful. It was everything I needed to hear to expand my research. So thanks for taking the time out of your day. This concludes the interview.

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: S-Media Relations- 2/16/2015*

So let me just walk you through what we're going to talk about. First I'm going to get some general knowledge. Next I'm going to talk about your career starting with your education at Penn State through your current work. Finally I'll ask you how you would mentor future students following a similar career path.

*Sure!*

And I just want to remind you that all of your responses will be confidential and you are welcome to skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

*Ok.*

So what was your graduation year?

*May 2014.*

And your major and minor?

*I was public relations, as my major. And my minor was labor employment relations.*

Ok. And then what was your first job, the title and company, after graduation?

*So I worked at AOL, but it was Huff Post Live. And I was a public relations and communications fellow.*

Ok. And then what is your current job?

*So I was at Huff Post, just for some background, I was there until October. Then two months later I started at Ketchum sports and entertainment. And I'm currently an account coordinator.*

Ok got it. What I'm hoping to gather feedback for students who want to follow a similar career path to you. So what would you say your PR specialty is? What area of public relations?

*I think my strong suit is my writing and media skills. Like calling, pitching, making media connections within the brand...So right now I'm working with brand but with Huff Post I was doing interview segments and I was in charge of pitching that content to let's say Us Weekly or People or Hollywood Reporter. Something like that. So I guess my communication skills and writing skills are my forte.*

So within media relations?

*Yeah I guess that's in media relations.*

Great. So tell me about your decision to major in public relations at Penn State

*Ok so I first started off as advertising/PR and took classes in both. I always thought that advertising was the creative aspect. And throughout the class I thought that the media relations aspect, connecting and working with a product or a celebrity from start to finish, was a little more appealing to me. But I think that through my internship experience, which I can go through with you... I first started out at a PR firm after freshman year. I literally had no idea what I wanted to do. But after having that internship at a firm, I worked with fashion, hotels and travel companies... this firm was also entertainment related so celebrities were involved. That sparked my interest in the PR realm, versus advertising. Then after that, throughout the summer when I was home, I interned at Wenner Media- so Us Weekly, Rolling Stone, and Men's Journal. And*

*after that I was at Food Network three days a week and NBC two days a week and sometimes at night too. So I think after all of those experiences, they were all PR related, I loved everything I did up until that point. So I stuck with PR.*

You had very impressive internships!

*Thank you!*

So when and why did you decide to pursue media relations specifically? Or was that what was thrown on you from internships?

*It was kind of part of day-to-day work. Say, if I go back to Us Weekly, I would write a draft press release of the hot stories, top pictures of the week, or topics, whatever. And I love the celebrity news cycle. I think it's great and I love television too. So I think that once that job was handed to me, and then making those connections like "oh this is something the Hollywood Reporter would pick up right away let me pitch this out," something like that... When I was younger I didn't have the much leeway but now in my first job I'm starting to learn the ins-and-outs of pitching. And learning which photos are approved and which aren't approved. If they mention one of the brands that we represent... OK well if they mentioned it wrong I'll reach out to them again to correct it. It's been part of my job title, but I loved making those connections and also making sure our product or celebrity is placed accordingly.*

Got it, great. So can you tell me about a time you felt your education prepared you at work?

*Ok! I want to say it was in class, but definitely all of the Penn State Career Fairs, just that networking, allowed me to get where I am today. At Success in the City, I met one of the people I interviewed with later on. I remember sitting, it was in XXX's class, and we were talking about landing jobs and making connections. We had a whole class on making sure we represent ourselves in a way a company would want to hire us. So COMM 473. As much as I loved my classes, it was my teacher's advice that made sure we knew what PR was and also how to position ourselves as public relations work, putting ourselves out there in a situation where we would be a product and we want to sell ourselves.*

Marketing yourself!

*Exactly. I loved all of my classes at Penn State, but most of my PR classes that related to real world experiences were the most beneficial.*

Ok! Yeah that's good to hear. What about a time when you felt unprepared for a public relations task?

*I'm trying to think...not in the sense that I didn't know how to do it, but when there are tight deadlines and you're making sure everything is, what my agency calls "client ready." And that goes back to my grammar skills and double-checking. So maybe it doesn't relate directly to my education but making sure that you're taking the time, and not being a perfectionist per say, but that everything is in a way that someone paying for your services will want to see it. That was one of my first struggles. I was so busy with so many projects so making sure that everything looked ready without errors whatsoever... and now being here four months I think, "Wow I've made a lot of mistakes." But that took a lot of work. It's new. Making sure time management skills and skills like that were some of the mistakes that I made.*

Yeah that's one of the things I'm nervous about.

*Yeah but people want to help you. They want to see you succeed. So after being here for four months, having a review, getting people's opinions... It's an eye opener because you don't realize how you can make minor changes that make a better end result.*

Ok nice. And can you describe a skill you think media relations values more than other PR disciplines?

*Um. Ok. I definitely think being professional is one aspect, but in a way that you communicate in an email. I know when I get an email for certain requests that are media related that the way you speak to someone should always be as professional as if they are a senior executive at a company. And I think that also you are providing them with information. Let me use an example. So Gwen Stefani did a deal with MasterCard, and MasterCard is our client. So I think that having your writing skills and communication skills come across as exciting now that Us Weekly is going to report this. Like that needs to be top-notch versus when you're in a different field within public relations, something needs to be... If it's a financial clients or a Business Wire piece... those need to be structured in a different way than an entertainment piece.*

Right.

*It's the differences between what your outlet is targeted to and your audiences.*

Ok great! And this last section is just on curriculum design. So if you were mentoring an underclassman pursuing a career path similar to yours in media relations, what would you suggest to major and minor in?

*I definitely think public relations would be the best fit. And minoring? So my minor is random, HR related, but I probably would have liked having a business minor. I started off as that and realized it was too much for me. I wanted to go abroad and other things got in my way. But I think if I took the time to understand the financial side of things... now I am working with finance teams and stuff like that. I am a little clueless at times. I definitely think that business background would be helpful. I know when I was at Penn State, I went to random presentations media studies related or broadcast related, and it definitely makes your experience diverse among others. A lot of people from my company come from music or sports backgrounds. Some sort of tie-in with the entertainment or sports industry if that makes sense.*

Yes. So if you were mentoring an underclassman pursuing media relations, what types of courses would you make mandatory?

*Well all the classes I took related to public relations were great in improving my writing and communication skills. I didn't take it but I think there's a features writing class. I can't remember other because my schedule was filled with kind of random classes too. But I think if you can expand whatever you're interested in then take it. If you want to take a seminar from the broadcast department or a company comes and speak, and you're interested in it, you should go. Like I knew I went to a NBC event. Classes per say, I don't remember. But I took that Google search terms...*

Like a search engine optimization class?

*Yeah. And that's really helpful for when you're searching media results. I've learned through the databases we use like Cision and Critical Mention, I thought that was really cool. The digital things are up and coming so anything digital related I recommend taking.*

So one more question. If you were given the opportunity to enroll in one additional PR class and one additional elective class, what would you take and why?

*Can I repeat an answer?*

Of course!

*For an elective a business or management class. For a PR class...*

You can make it up!

*Ok so what I talked about before, the digital side of social media PR and how, I know working at an agency now, how bad things versus earned social posts. I think that's so interesting how much pickup one gets versus the other. PR versus advertising and how much a celebrity gets paid, something like that. I would be interested and I think a lot of people would be interested in it. We see all of these advertisements and social posts every day from celebrities, and you never know if they're client related or product related or if they're getting paid. So an elective or PR class like that, a social PR class.*

I know we have a social media class, but you're talking about digging into how social media is used and measuring it, the analytical side too?

*Yeah exactly.*

Wonderful, thanks. So that actually concludes my interview!

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: P- Media Relations-2/25/2015*

So this is a little roadmap of what we're going to talk about. I'm going to start with general information, then ask about your education and early career, then end with mentoring scenarios for underclassmen students pursuing a similar career path to yours.

*Ok!*

I just want to remind you that all of your responses to these questions are confidential and you are welcome to skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

*Ok! Are you an honors student?*

Yes I am. So this is a part of my honors thesis. Would you like a little background before we get started?

*Yeah, I would love a little background about the project and what it's about.*

Sure. So my honors thesis is focused on PR education and my goal is to speak with alumni in different public relations specialties. Then, with their responses about curriculum design and important skillsets, I want to make recommended academic plans for students pursuing similar career goals. So I'll ask you to identify a discipline: social and digital media, consumer marketing, corporate communications, media relations... then I hope to highlight from these answers which classes or other activities would be most beneficial in giving students direction. It's predominantly a research project although it would be great to share this information. I just found out today I'm presenting it in March, which is exciting!

*Oh that is exciting!*

Yeah so it's great to see how alumni like you are so willing to help and participate so it's been a great experience so far.

*Mhmm!*

So first, what's your graduation year?

*It was this past May 2014.*

What was your major and minor?

*My major was public relations, but the actual title was advertising/public relations with the public relations concentration. And I minored in kinesiology.*

Oh wow I've never heard that combination before.

*Yeah it's interesting. I don't know if you want a little background on me. But I came to Penn State and was in the Division of Undergraduate Studies because I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. And so after hopping around from a couple of different majors, I decided that I really wanted to do athletic training. And when I went to sit down with an adviser in that College, they basically told me that I was ineligible because the deadline for certain requirements was in a week or two. And there was no way I could fulfill all of the requirements. So it was a choice of staying in school for an extra year and hopefully liking athletic training or finding something else that interested me. So I met with XXX in the College of Comm and she really was the first person that I talked to about PR. She said that I should take the Introduction to Public Relations course and see what I think about it. So I took it and really enjoyed it. So that's where I got where I am now.*

That's awesome.

*Yeah. And since I did have that interest in athletic training I kept going to complete the minor and down the line if I change my mind, I can go back to school and get my license in athletic training since I have some education in that field.*

*Right so you kept your options open.*

*Exactly. So that's how I got where I am now.*

Well you just answered my first question! It was "tell me about your decision to major in PR at Penn State." So that was great! What was your first job, title and company, after graduation?

*Well I am probably one of the many graduates, not just from Penn State, that wasn't really sure where I was going. I knew I was coming back home to New York. I started applying to a couple of things. I really wanted to go into sports, on the organization side. So working for either the New York Giants, MLB, something of that nature... But everything that I was applying to either didn't pan out or it had openings in ticket sales, which I didn't really want to do because I knew it wouldn't give me experience in PR or communications. And I didn't want to focus on that and go on that path. But after I graduated I was lucky enough to have a part-time job so I did that all summer. And in August I decided I should be broadening my horizons. So I sat down one day and collected my thoughts to find other areas of interest. I came to the conclusion that consumer brands, food and beverage, and travel were the other areas I was interested in. So I ended up applying to an internship with a small travel PR firm in New York. Do you need company names?*

*Sure!*

*It was Hawkins International. I can send you my resume you have all of my spelling! So I was accepted there and took an internship there until mid-November. It was an unpaid internship so I wasn't really making any money at this time. I was back and forth between the internship and working part-time. So I decided I'm leaving the internship a month early. I was plateauing and I wasn't really getting the experience that I wanted.*

Was your position public relations intern? Or just called general intern?

*Yeah I was a PR intern, and it was strictly travel. So I was a travel PR intern and I ended up becoming the only travel intern that stayed until mid-November. Everyone else either left or one girl got hired. So I kind of was getting all of the work thrown on me and it was not advancing assignments. I decided to leave and I still had my part-time job until December. I kept my part-time job and started looking again for entry-level jobs and internships. I knew with my background, I didn't have too many PR internships. When I was at school I interned for the athletics communications department. It was more doing media relations or events. It wasn't so much public relations based, I would say. And prior to that I interned at an events marketing company. I worked events and did a lot of marketing research. So I applied to a bunch of things and accepted another travel PR internship with a company called Quinn. And they recently rebranded this year to become a lifestyle firm. They originally focused on travel and real estate but now they brought in food and beverage, spas and starting to expand into different consumer brands. So I'm on the travel side now. I've been there since right after the New Year.*

So what's your specific title there?

*My specific title is public relations intern. But I'm working on the travel team.*

Ok. So what are your typical assignments? You don't fall into media relation, corporate communications, or maybe brand work?

*Interesting question. The best way I could put it is that the everyday assignments I get now is your pretty much entry-level position that you would be assigned anyway. So pitching press releases, building media lists, doing research on different brands, presenting brand partnerships to the client, sitting in on brainstorm meetings, coming up with trending initiative to implement at the hotels or destinations. Your basic, entry-level PR work.*

Ok great. So can you tell me about a time you felt your education prepared you for work after graduation?

*I would say the, I don't remember the names of the classes, but one was COMM 473. Is that the capstone?*

Yeah!

*Yeah that definitely helped. Working as a team in that class on those PR campaigns really taught me how to work with a team you would be put on to help a client or work on a client campaign. So that was really beneficial. As well as, I can't remember the name. I know XXX teaches it.*

The crisis communications class? The writing methods?

*Not the crisis one. It's the class you learn how to write everything PR related like fact sheets...*

COMM 471?

*That's it.*

Ok. Can you think of a time you felt unprepared for a public relations assignment after graduation?

*I wouldn't say I was unprepared for the tasks at my jobs. I was probably unprepared when it came to networking. It's a little telling because Penn State doesn't sell the alumni network. It should be the number one thing you're selling, this alumni network, because you need it to get a job. Just coming from New York and going to a school really not too far from State College... there wasn't enough done to help us connect with alumni in the city. So I would just say the networking side, rather than education side, is where it would probably need to be bumped up.*

Right. And for the rest of the interview we're going to focus on one aspect of your job. I know you have a comprehensive experience with PR. Would you rather focus on how you work with the media with pitches and press releases? Or client work, consumer marketing...?

*I would say the media relations just because two of my clients that I'm working with now are pretty slow.*

Ok! So can you describe a skill you think media relations values more than other communications fields? What skill really helps you succeed in your work in media relations? *I would say following up and building relationships with journalists. That's something that when you're talking about media relations, it needs to be done. At first you never want to seem too pushy with them. But with this internship I've learned you can never follow up enough. Even if they respond you should follow up and say, "hey this is what's going on with the client xyz... it might fit your publication in your next issue." So always keeping the client on the journalist's radar.*

Totally makes sense. Being proactive, keeping constant communication, following up...

*Exactly.*

So in a career in media relations, what would you suggest to major and minor in?

*They should definitely major in PR. But when I went to school they stopped letting PR students from double majoring or minoring in marketing...*

Yeah they still have that rule I think. But you don't have to reflect on the school's limitations. *Ok so I think PR and marketing. They go so hand in hand. Or I would say PR or minor in mass communication.*

Ok cool. If you were pursuing an underclassman student pursuing a career in media relations, what skill would you emphasize as important in building during their academic career?

*I would say organization. It's so important for building media contacts and following up. It's the key to maintaining those relationships. And when you're a junior account executive or entry-level person, you're really the one that's looked at to send those minor press releases and pitches. So if you're not organized to schedule, follow up, and push whatever news is coming from the client you're really not able to gain that coverage in those glossier, top-tier publications.*

Right! So I have two more questions. If you were designing a public relations concentration in media relations, what types of classes would you make mandatory? You can make them up.

They don't have to necessarily exist.

*Ok. I would say some sort of almost... It's called capstone right, I'm not making this up?*

Yes that's what it's called.

*Ok. Almost a capstone when you learn how to reach out to journalists who are well-known in the industry. So maybe if you were able to interview them to learn about their background, where they came from, advice on the interview, learn how to interview a client or a brand. That would be a course I would suggest.*

For the sake of pitching? To learn how a journalist thinks?

*Exactly. And taking journalism classes just to see how it work son the other side. If you receive that pitch, how it turns into a story.*

Yeah I like that idea.

So my last question is if you were given the opportunity to enroll in one additional PR class and one elective class today, what classes would you like to take and why?

*It can be made up?*

Totally.

*I know with accounting majors they leave for a semester and intern there. So I would say it would be beneficial if it as a public relations major or a media relations minor to see how it work before graduating.*

An internship program?

*Yeah, an internship program that you did as a part of your core curriculum. Even it wasn't in a major city, but the Athletics Communications Department or the College of Communications. Something on campus. Even working as a mock PR representative for the Lion Ambassadors. Being put in a position where you had to market a club or organization on campus.*

So a hands-on experience?

*Yeah, exactly.*

So what about an elective? It could even be from a different college.

*I would honestly say, as weird as it sounds, an IST prep that teaches you how to properly use Microsoft Suite. Agencies use that all the time, especially Excel. So I think a course in that would be beneficial.*

Ok great! Those were awesome answers. That actually concludes my interview.

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: S-Media Relations-3/17/2015*

I really appreciate you taking the time out of your day to talk about your public relations education and work. Just to give you an idea about what we're talking about, I'm going to start with some general information, then ask about your education and early work, then ask you to think about how you would mentor an undergraduate student following a similar career path. And I just want to remind you that all of your responses to these questions are confidential and you are welcome to skip any question you prefer not to answer. Ok?

*Ok. Yep!*

So what was your graduation year, major and minor?

*My graduation year was spring 2012. I majored in PR, well technically PR and advertising but a concentration in public relations. My minors were in international studies and psychology.*

Awesome. Ok so what was your first job, title and company, after graduation?

*I started as an account coordinator at Ketchum Public Relations.*

Ok. And what's your current job, title and company?

*So I was with Ketchum for about two and a half years. I was promoted twice there. And then I actually, yesterday, started a new job at an event-planning agency.*

So with this research I'm hoping to collect reflection or feedback on the PR curriculum but also provide more guidance to students pursuing a specific career path. Right now I have interviewed about three different divisions. Those three are media relations, consumer marketing, and social/digital media. Do you feel comfortable...or which of those do you feel the most qualified or confident talking about?

*What was the second one?*

It was media relations, consumer marketing, and digital/social PR.

*Media relations.*

Awesome. So now we're going to talk about education. Can you talk about your decision to major in PR at Penn State?

*Sure. So I actually, in high school, worked at my mom's event planning company and one of her clients was and continues to be the public relations society of New York.*

Oh wow.

*Well PRSA New York Chapter is a better way to phrase that. So I'm not sure if you're aware of their awards, Silver Anvils, but in New York they have the Big Apple awards which is their New York-specific yearly awards. And one of the tasks that I had was handling all of the different entries from different companies, and compiling them into the database. Then afterwards, once all of the judging was completed and the awards were finalized, sort of helping with distributing all of these awards. So because of that I was obviously at the ceremony and had a firsthand look at all of these different campaigns and really got some great exposure to different PR agencies. And so I really felt that was somewhere I would be comfortable and interested in what they were*

*doing. So they kind of pushed me toward PR. So when I went to Penn State I applied as a PR major and began my freshman year as a decided PR major.*

*Awesome sounds like an inside scoop on the industry.*

*Yeah I was really lucky. I had an insider perspective before really experiencing it so I was pretty fortunate.*

Very. So when and why did you decide to pursue media relations. Did you do that at Ketchum mostly?

*Well of course I understood from my education at Penn State that media relations was of course an integral part of working in PR. But I didn't apply for jobs specific to media relations. I just applied to PR positions and media relations, stuff like that.*

Talking about your education, can you tell me about a time you felt prepared for work because of your Penn State education?

*Sure so when I got my job at Ketchum I actually got a job specifically in their healthcare department. So I was basically, not basically, all of my clients were pharmaceutical companies. So interestingly enough I recently, it was actually just a couple of months ago, one of the products that we represented... We represent certain products from the companies, not the pharmaceutical companies themselves. So one of the products that we represented for a client was experiencing a major drug shortage. You know, it's something you don't hear a ton about in mainstream media but it's a very big deal in the world of healthcare because when a drug that is allowing people to function in their day-to-day lives, suddenly is treated as unavailable...*

*Yeah that's an issue.*

*It's a front-page story for pharmaceutical focused outlets and for doctors, advocacy groups and patients. So XXX actually told us all about the Tylenol case, when there was some sort of poison found in bottles of Tylenol, which I'll never forget. You know... because that story is crazy. So that was a case I looked back on. That's kind of a case study when the company didn't necessarily "miss that." When there's a drug shortage the first question is "why didn't your company prepare to have the amount of drugs that was needed?" Which there can be plenty of reasons for, but at the end of the day that's what the media wants to know. It immediately becomes the company's fault.*

Right so you had some sort of idea what you were dealing with because of a class case study?

*Yeah I didn't necessarily have experience but I had some learning from class.*

That's a great example.

And the flip side of this question is can you describe a time you felt unprepared for a public relations assignment at work?

*Yeah, media relations and pitching and interacting with journalists weren't something I really had exposure to in my education. I had some experience in it from various internships but you know when you're an intern you can't really... when you're an intern for ten weeks you can't really foster relationships with journalists that you'll come to need when working in the field. Because a lot of great new stories are not necessarily the results of groundbreaking news but the results of "I have a great relationship with this journalist who I always give groundbreaking news to, when I have it. So I know that he will return the favor and cover this story, because I'm the one who's pitching it. Not because it's a story he feels needs to be covered." And to be fair, I don't know what the solution to that would be, necessarily. At the same time in a four-month*

*period, a class can't necessarily give you that because they can't make up news and tell you to go pitch it and practice it.*

But that is an answer I've heard before.

*It's just such an integral piece of this job. It's a shame that there hasn't really been a way anyone has thought of to give that experience. For example, career centers hold mock interviews, so I think that for PR majors there needs to be mock pitching.*

Yeah that's a great idea. So can you describe a skill you think media relations values more than other communications specialties?

*I think that media relations, as I said, is so much about developing relationships that I think that any media relations position you need to be able to interact with people at a professional but still efficient level. And that's honestly one of the most important things to value in media relations.*

Definitely. And this last section is just on curriculum design. If you were mentoring an undergraduate student pursuing a job in media relations, what would you suggest to major and minor in?

*I think that if it were possible, and this is based on the student and a lot of different criteria but if it was possible for them to double major in PR and journalism, I think that would be really helpful. I think that given what I already said that we don't get a ton of media relations, the best next thing is to understand the mindset of a journalist.*

That's a great point. And then, if you were mentoring an undergraduate student pursuing a job in media relations, what skill would you emphasize in fostering in their academic career. So I know you said relationship building, but what about something else they can do in an academic setting?

*I think that time management and organization are so important, in any field of communications but especially PR. Timeliness is everything. You lose chances to get amazing news stories in an hour if the story that you're trying to sell to a journalist is something that can be spun by a competitor or another relevant industry, and not just your product. Just to give you an example I already discussed, if I were working for Tylenol and something came out about over the counter pain relievers, and something came out and Advil spoke to Bloomberg, New York Times, or CNN before them, then in the story they will likely mention Tylenol than they would Advil. And will likely be in Advil's favor rather than Tylenol's... whatever the new information is pitting the two against each other. So time management and understanding the idea of timeliness are probably the most important.*

Ok great. And if you were designing a public relations concentration in media relations, what types of courses would make mandatory? And you can make these up.

*I would make a client relations course, or a course that isn't necessarily only about client relations but it encompasses how to deal with clients and how to handle client situations mandatory. And I would make a focused media relations class. I think that there is a semesters-worth of things you need to know about true media relations, and how to pitch to journalists. Because writing a pitch is not the hard part.*

What do you think the hard part is?

*Selling it to the journalists and convincing them that what you have to say, even if it's what 10 other people have to say, is worth coming from your point of view.*

And making it as newsworthy as possible?

*Yeah so it's about the delivery. It's about getting comfortable with delivery, which isn't easy because when you're first journeying out in this industry you're cold calling people. You don't have any relationships and that's not your fault. But the only way to develop the relationships is by honing in on a specific skill set you can't read out of a book, you have to practice. You need practical training.*

Totally. Ok. So my last question is if you're given the opportunity to enroll in one public relations courses and one elective course meaning from another college, today, what two courses would you take and why?

*I would have loved to take something that gave me more legal background. I think that not in all fields, but in certain fields that are really helpful like in my field having an understanding of legal proceedings is helpful.*

How law relates to business? Or mass communications law?

*Not communications law. Realistically like a general legal class and understanding legal jargon and understanding different lawsuits and different legal action people can take against companies. For me I say companies because I didn't represent people when I worked in PR or strictly media relations, I should say. I represented products. So people weren't suing the CEO of the company, but the product that wasn't helping them or causing them to get sick. They were suing the company.*

Ok got it. And what about a specific PR class or do you feel like you have what you need to know?

*Do you mean now, like if I could enroll now as a post-grad.*

Yeah

*I feel like working in the field was what I needed. But if I could go back it would be a media relations class, as a refresher.*

Ok! Thank you so much. That concludes my interview.

## Consumer Marketing

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: A-Consumer Marketing- 2/5/2014*

Ok so just to give you an idea of what we're going to talk about. First, I'd like to get some general information. Next, I'm going to ask you a few questions about your career, starting with your education at Penn State through your current work. Finally, I'll ask you to think about how you would mentor future students following a similar career path. And I just want to remind you that your responses to all of these questions will be confidential and you are welcome to skip any specific questions that you prefer not to answer. Ok?

*Yep!*

Ok what was your graduation year?

*December 2012.*

Ok and your major? Minor?

*Public relations. Psychology.*

Ok. Now what was your first job, the title and company, after graduation?

*Sure. I was an Assistant Account Executive at Rubenstein Associates. I can spell that if you need.*

Yes please.

*R-U-B-E-N-S-T-E-I-N Associates, which was a generalist PR firm in New York. Very big, very robust clientele like the Yankees, the Super Bowl, Time 100 events, the Tribeca Film Festival. So kind of a large firm I think.*

Yeah that sounds like an awesome experience.

*Thanks.*

And then what about your current job, title and company?

*Sure, I am the Integrated Marketing Coordinator at W magazine.*

Ok awesome. [Previous participant] told me you worked there and it's great to see alumni in positions like that. So, I don't know if you totally get what my research is about, but I'm asking alumni about their current public relations specialties so my research can identify how a student could customize their college career to build the skills needed to pursue their desired career path. So what you describe as your area of public relations, your specialty? Would it be consumer marketing?

*Yeah I think so. Well, it's kind of interesting. I didn't study marketing at Penn State it's kind of funny where you see yourself falling after you graduate. But I think a lot of what I learned- internships too- made for a seamless transition to what I'm doing now. Just in terms of getting on the phone... not so much pitching things but getting on the other side and trying to grow the*

*brand and being looked at in a positive light and trying to see the greatness of the brand so that they invest in it.*

Great! Awesome. So just some questions about your education... can you tell me about your decision to major in public relations at Penn State?

*I actually went in as a journalism major. I took the standard classes that everyone takes as a freshman, like ECON. But what ended up happening that once it was time for me to declare I had a fairly good GPA and happened to have all the classes needed to be accepted into the public relations major. So basically, I'm assuming it's the same now, but you needed certain classes and a certain GPA to qualify for the major. And at that point I was already there. So I might as well push myself a little bit further and go with it. At the time I was working for the Collegian, and I was really immersed in journalism, but I felt that with PR I could kind of get the best of both. I can still write a lot, as much as I want to, and have some business sense and learn about that side.*

Yeah makes sense. So when you were pursuing your job at W Magazine, what made you pursue that route in public relations?

*I wasn't looking for a job when I got approached by W. Basically it was very much a mutual family friend who had an opening and I went in and met for an informational interview. Then I ended up getting the job. So it was one of those things that if you asked my 8th grade self what was my dream job, I would say working for a magazine. So I had to go, even if I have no idea about marketing. I know, at Penn State, it's funny...some of my friends were advertising/public relations/marketing and we didn't know what from what. They all intertwined a bit. So I felt ok about pursuing marketing. And I got really immersed in it and it will be two years coming this summer. Anyone who enjoys and has a passion for PR would be great in this kind of role as well.*

Awesome. That's cool to hear how you wanted to work for a magazine when you were younger and then you got there.

*Totally, I was like wow this is pretty cool, you know?*

Yeah you have to seize that opportunity. Ok so next question. Can you tell me about a time your education prepared you at work?

*There was this teacher... are you a PR major?*

Yeah I'm a PR major too.

*Did you have any classes with XXX?*

I've actually had two!

*Ok that's so funny because she... I had something with her I can't remember the name. But she was kind of a Godsend to me. She took a liking to me and asked me to help her with her research. And research isn't my strong point and it was never the aspect of PR I got crazy excited about. I ended up taking two classes with her and doing an independent study for credit my last semester. And she really has some great insight into the world outside of the classroom. And she did some things to work on and we ended up publishing a study. So my name was attached to her study and that was super cool while I was still in college. It was super nice of her to include me. I was crunching numbers and doing things for her, it was really great. She gave me a lot of insight so I felt really fortunate about that.*

Yeah she is very in-touch. She's always helping us remain competitive and staying connected.

*Yeah she's tough. I remember my first class with her I was like, "Oh my god I'm going to fail this." It was super hard. But she knows her stuff. That's her specialty, the research area. And she was always willing to help, she knew executives at Edelman and wanted to help me succeed. There's a portfolio that I made in her class that I still use.*

That's so funny. I had to make my portfolio for her last semester.

*I'm so thankful now. When I really wanted a new job I couldn't find a second to create a new portfolio so I'm glad someone forced me into it. It's nice to have it in my back pocket.*

Yeah well that's good to hear. So, can you describe a time when you felt unprepared for a public relations task?

*I mean every place you work is different. I interned one summer at Animal Planet so when someone told me "can you dress up this press release"- it was super fun and colorful and vibrant. And then another internship, a different summer, it was more cut dry, black and white, no detail. So that's something to always keep in mind at classes. It depends on the client, what's going on. They should give you multiple things to write press releases about and write for fun things and different things. Because that's what the world is like.*

Right every company has its own needs.

*Yeah and I wish I was exposed to that earlier.*

So, can you describe a skill that your job at W magazine values more than communications fields may?

*I'm trying to think. Can you give an example?*

Sure. If you were working in social media that might require different skill sets than corporate communications. So what's something you would need to know how to do more than other professionals may need to rely on?

*Oh ok. Client interaction. It really does depend if you're at a firm versus in-house. But all day long I'm talking to different brands, trying to juggle what this person is looking for compared to this person, then comparing proposals, different aspects of that. So it's a combination of multi-tasking and interface with the client.*

Ok great. Now this last section is just on curriculum design. If you were mentoring an underclassman pursuing a job in consumer marketing, what would you suggest to major in?

*I would suggest still majoring in public relations because I do think it's a good curriculum. But maybe get a minor in marketing. Or major marketing, minor in PR... some combination of the two. I wish I had a background in marketing, not because it really matters truthfully but it would be cool. No one asks me anymore, I almost forgot what I minored in. But it's kind of nice to have that background if you do every get in it. There wouldn't be as much of a learning curve.*

Ok! So if your mentee did some sort of combination of marketing and public relations, what kind of elective courses would you recommend to better prepare them for the job?

*I may not be answering your questions so let me know. But I saw that thing students can go to LA now. I would say that a thousand percent yes. I was just talking to my dad about why is this just happening now.*

I know. I missed it by a year and I'm devastated.

*I would have done that and never come home. I mean I don't know if that's answering your question and I also can't speak to that program.*

But some sort of immersive program like that?

*Yeah. Another good thing is Success at the City. That's how I got my first internship at Discovery. I was so happy to be in the College of Communications for their career center. XXX was so helpful for me. I sat in their office near graduation and combed through every detail of my life and I was just so thankful. It was so great. And Success in the City I love. I live in Staten Island so it was such a pain to go back and forth. But it was so helpful to meet- I don't know where you live- but when the Career Fairs are in Pennsylvania all the good jobs have to hike out here. And there's a slimmer chance you'll get to meet Time Warner or whoever. So that was a really smart idea what they did. I'm sure you'll find tons of people who didn't find internships, but it was so useful.*

Well that's good to hear. Yeah I'm from the Philly suburbs but worked in New York over the summer...so now I totally have the city bug and just want to go back. So Success in the City will hopefully be helpful. Can you think of any specific courses, like in writing or math, which you found helpful?

*I mean I hate math. But I graduated a semester early so I didn't cram my classes, but I took what I had to take and then got out of there. So some of my classes were nonsense, like about bugs.*

Oh your general education requirements?

*Yeah but a lot of it is a blur, some sort of witchcraft classes to fill a humanities class. But I never had an issue with any of the courses you have to take for PR. The reporting class, research class, they're fine. Anything additional I can't really think of.*

Ok. If you were mentoring the same student pursuing a job in consumer marketing, what skill would you emphasize as important in fostering in their academic career?

*Writing, I guess. Even casual writing like a letter or email. It's a thing you don't consider really. You can make a story but you have to be able to talk to people all day long. Getting on the phone. Building your communication skills, it sounds like a cliché and no brainer. But building a presence, maybe with a blog or things with social media. If you happen to work at a brand with no social media presence, you can do that. It takes nothing because you do it yourself. And that's a cool thing. Like when I got here, we didn't have a promotional Instagram. So I started one. And I thought why not? Vanity Fair has one. Glamor has one. It's growing, but it's my thing now.*

It's your baby.

*It is. It's my baby. It's cool because I'm already Instagramming every eight seconds so I might as well use that. PR is a great field. It's cool to incorporate whom I am and what I like to do and I like to get on the phone, talk to people, tweet things.*

Makes sense. Now two more questions. So if you were designing a concentration within the major of public relations with a concentration in consumer PR/marketing, what kind of courses would you make mandatory?

*Mandatory? I wish I had a list in front of me.*

Well just from your professional experience, what skills should you have?

*Can I make them up?*

Totally.

*You can be so prepared but if your resume sucks no one is going to look at you. So maybe a career class to teach you to interview, put together a cover letter that could be a whole class. A writing class, I forget which writing class it was but we wrote pitches, bios...*

Yeah the writing methods class, the general PR writing class.  
*Totally, and research does come into play here. There's a research department but you're always pulled in. It's a part of everything. So that's important to know.*

Ok. Now if you were given the opportunity to enroll in one additional PR class and one additional elective class in any class, what two courses would you take and why?

*I can't really remember. I get to choose?*

Anything in PR you would want to go back in a formal setting and learn about?

*Honestly, I wish I had a class in Innovation Park. You just don't know. You'll see if you start getting star-crazy in something you feel empowered to do anything or communications in general. Some days I'm like oh that would be super cool to work in TV and do that. You could feel saturated in public relations, so you want to see what the telecomm students are doing.*

Ok great and a non-communications course?

*Oh totally, yeah.*

Can you think of anything specific?

*I guess an Introduction to Coding. I actually am working on revamping our blogs to be completely new, gorgeous and so it can also host sweepstakes. We're working with a developer and so badly I wish I could sit there and code things. I feel like we wouldn't have to pay this guy to do it I could go and do it.*

Ok! Yeah well that concludes my interview. Thank you so much for going through that with such thoughtful answers.

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: H-Consumer Marketing- 2/16/2015*

Thank you for letting me interview you and pick your brain! I'm just going to give you a little overview of what we're going to talk about. First I'll just get some general information. Then I'll ask a few questions about your education and early career. Finally I'll ask you to think about how you would mentor an undergraduate student pursuing a career path similar to yours.

*Ok, great.*

And I just want to remind you that the answers to all of these questions are confidential and you can skip any question if you prefer not to answer.

*Ok.*

Ok, awesome. So what was your graduation year?

*2011.*

And what was your major and minors?

*My major was advertising/public relations but I focused on the public relations track and I minored in business and labor employee relations.*

Ok. And what was your first job after graduation, the title and company?

*Well, I'll talk about this more later but, I worked at Lois Paul and Partners, a public relations agency, and my title was intern.*

And what's your current job, title and company?

*I am a Professional Relations Representative at the Renfrew Institution of Massachusetts.*

Ok awesome. So the whole point of my research is to pinpoint what your specialty is, then using your feedback and other professional's feedback, I'm hoping to make recommended academic plans that students can follow to tailor their academic career to their professional goals. So, do you know what I mean by PR specialty? Corporate communications, crisis communications, social and digital media...

*Mhmm.*

So where would you pinpoint your expertise?

*Well, my situation is a little bit different. So when I started and worked at LPP my specialty or expertise was more social media and media relations but my current job isn't really PR at all. I mean it is PR but we have a department that I work with them but I don't do PR. So I would say more community relations and marketing for that.*

So can I put you in that marketing category?

*Yeah, yeah.*

Ok so that's what I'll pick your brain about later. So tell me about your decision to major in PR at Penn State.

*Sorry I feel like all of my answers sound cynical but I started in journalism, but after a semester of getting some experience in journalism, working at the Collegian, taking a couple intro classes, I realized the job market was pretty lacking. And I didn't want to work for four years and have to do something else to get a job. It sounds very "Debbie downer" but it was the truth in that day.*

*And I knew I wanted to do something in communications. And after spending all of that time writing, I realized that I was missing the people piece of it. So I switched to PR because I wanted to relate to people and communities.*

Awesome. So when and why did you pursue this more marketing area specifically?

*Again, I apologize again for sounding cynical.*

Oh no, no!

*So I worked at LPP for almost three years and I think as a lot of PR grads discover after graduation, working in a PR agency that you either love or hate... You may love it when you begin it, but then there's this huge burnout factor. And in three years, I reached that unfortunately. And while it was fantastic experience and I consider myself a public relations specialist across different industries and spectrums, all of which I was able to apply to my new job, I just really love looking for something different other than traditional public relations. Three years of it was more than enough. So my goals for pursuing a job was at the root of why I wanted to PR in general, relating to people and connecting communities- the whole community relations side. So I had a pretty long, drawn-out search. I didn't just want to jump to a new job just to get a new job. So the opportunity was a really good mix of what I wanted to do, more on the marketing spectrum, and just a cool opportunity to work for a company that has a mission that I really believe, which was also something I was looking for. It's hard to get passionate about your work if you don't really believe in it.*

I like your story it's interesting! Now can you think of a time your education prepared you at work? Is there an example that comes to mind?

*Let's see. It did. As a whole it did. But I took a crisis communications class with XXX... so this is the thing about the College of Communications in my opinion. I don't know if you've taken the class but at the end there's a press conference. And it's a really stressful situation. He gave us a real-life, PR crisis and students had to do a press conference to actual, real, local media State College reporters and people like that. So we had to talk about the crisis, and that type of thing. So while I didn't go into crisis communications that opportunity was great because it really taught me how to think on my feet, react with tactful, appropriate way. And really represent whatever I was representing in a really positive way. That was definitely one of those experiences in the classroom that I thought of a lot in my professional career. And have reflected on. But just as a whole College of Comm was great.*

Yeah the hot seat is pretty famous. I didn't take the class but I've heard a lot about it.

*Yes, thank you that's the name of it. I forgot what it was called.*

So can you think of a time when your general education class or maybe something from your minors you felt prepared you at work?

*Yes let me think of a few, I have a couple of examples. So I took finance, which was totally unrelated to anything communications-wise. But that's actually an example of something I've used a lot in my everyday life as a real person. There's the budgeting aspects and actually knowing how to use Excel. I use Excel all the time and just learning how to use Excel in a class, where it was required for our homework, has been helpful. So taking finance was huge. I also feel like all of the gen-ed classes that didn't relate to anything was helpful. I think sometimes we get caught up with learning how to get a job, but learning to learn is so valuable. When you graduate, you'll just be working all the time. So it's nice to stimulate your brain in other ways.*

*Specifically what's coming to mind was the Joe Paterno and media course, back when it was offered. I refer to that on a regular basis, but I know it's not offered anymore so it might not help your project.*

I didn't even know it existed but it sounds interesting.

*Oh great now I feel really old! But I've applied a lot of those lessons.*

Oh no! The College of Communications changes their curriculum every year it seems. Not the requirements, but the courses offered. Like now there's a social media class and they didn't have that until recently.

*Right, yeah I'm glad they implemented that I suggested that long ago.*

Oh really?

*Yeah. I had another example that I'm trying to think of... SOC 119? Not the one with XXX. But like really great in terms of lessons I can apply to my daily life.*

Thank you for all of those examples that's great. So can you describe a time you felt unprepared for a public relations assignment? Like you were given a task and you didn't know how to do it.

*Yeah I feel like when I started my post-grad internship, there were a lot of things I had no idea what they were like basic day-to-day tasks. Like I'll never forget one of my first days at work I was asked to create a list of ed-cals. And I had absolutely no idea what that was.*

What was that?

*Ed-cals. Short for editorial calendars.*

Oh, yeah I didn't know that.

*It's just a random PR term but it's common. I quite literally cried on my way home, crying because I didn't know what an ed-cal was and I just was in school for four years.*

That's a good example. So the last question in this section is can you think of a skill that consumer marketing values more than other communication fields?

*Um, yeah being an actual person. I feel like a lot of times with PR, it's really easy to just crank out pitches and write, but being an actual human being is really important. Having a personality and the ability to talk about anything with anyone. That kind of trait, I guess you can't really learn that, but it's important with marketing/ public relations especially on the consumer marketing end. Because you'll always be put in situations that you'll be in a networking dinner, or hosting a luncheon or having a meeting with a bunch of doctors, that's kind of what I do right now. They might have something they want to talk about. So things like that, being able to kind of step away from the computer screen and go speak and represent yourself and your brand.*

That makes sense. And I know that Smeal offers a business etiquette course but the College of Communications doesn't, so maybe something like that?

*Yeah definitely should be required.*

Ok, ok I'll note that. Now I'm just going to ask you about the curriculum design. If you were going to mentor an undergraduate student pursuing a job in consumer marketing, what would you suggest to major or minor in?

*Well anyone pursuing a career in public relations... well let me take a step back. I think the College of Communications and Business College need to find a better way to work together in a more efficient manner. I had this experience and I have heard similar experiences that... people would start as a public relations major can't major in marketing, but people who start in marketing are able to add PR as a major. And I think the dual majors work really well together.*

*And I was frustrated that I wasn't able to do that because of some random rule. It didn't make sense to me. So I think that people considering a job similar to mine should do the dual major, which would be really helpful. Obviously if I was able to do that I would have. But having a business minor was valuable. But I also did the John Curley Center for Sports Journalism, which was nice because it kind of exposed me to something totally different. And made myself more marketable in the job search. I didn't only apply to sports-related jobs or take a sports job. But having that ability to go down that channel was nice, but at the same time I didn't pigeonhole myself to only do sports journalism or only do healthcare. It is a good amount of skill sets that you can apply to a different things based on your interest. Also one other thing is to figure you a way you're going to be able to apply what you want. I guess PR and journalism careers are few and far between so being able to figure out, not a backup plan per say, but other ways to apply your degree is really important.*

Yeah, yeah definitely. So ok. If you were going to pursue an underclassman pursuing a career in consumer marketing, what types of courses would you make mandatory? You said some sort of business etiquette, interpersonal skill course. Can you think of any others?

*A course that I took?*

Doesn't matter. You can also make up classes. They don't have to exist yet.

*Yeah business etiquette can be applied to any job. Then there's writing, it's so important in every capacity. But sometimes, while the College of Comm was wonderful and I loved it, doing writing assignments for the sake of doing writing assignments was frustrating. Some of my journalism classes were more applicable. Writing actual stories about actual things, rather than a prompt, and writing a pitch or byline based on that. The curriculum should be designed for something that's actually realistic thing you would be doing in real life. And also knowing the different types of writing styles for public relations. Back to your question about when I started in PR, I feel like there are so many unique types of writing in PR, and consumer marketing, but a lot of times you don't do a lot of that in our classes. Sure we would write a press release here or there but I didn't know what a bio line was when I graduated. But I was writing them in my first job. Pitching, different styles of pitching, how to write a good email. Things like that are so important and are the main take away of my PR degree that I take away from now. Just being able to write a good email... It's crazy how people can't write a good email.*

Writing in all those forms you would be exposed to as a professional, yeah makes sense.

*Yeah.*

So this last question is kind of an odd one but if you were given the opportunity to enroll in one additional public relations class and one additional elective class in any college, what would you take and why?

*Like ones that exist or...?*

No in theory. You can make them up. What's something you would want to learn more about? *I would have loved to take this social media class. I wanted that to exist when I was a student, but it didn't. That's another thing about PR, no matter what capacity of it that you're working in, you have to understand how to use social media for anything. I'm not writing content for social media now but I use it to network in my territory. So definitely social media. As far as a minor, I don't know. To go back to learning about the sake of learning, I would take something -- not every class you take has to be somehow applicable to your future job. Taking something off the wall, so something that you're interested in.*

So what that would be for you?

*Well I feel like I took most of the classes I wanted to take that were random. But I took a Martin Luther King history class, which was fantastic. That did have to do with PR with the whole public speaking aspect, but it was really cool.*

Yeah taking something that you would be passionate about.

*Yeah I took an anthropology class about Aztecs, Incas, Mayans and it was actually one of the most challenging classes I took at Penn State. But it was cool and I learned a lot.*

Yeah I really liked my anthropology class.

*Yeah it's nice to have a brain break from communications side of things. I encourage people to take something using the other side of their brain.*

Yeah sounds good. Thank you so much for your help!

*No I think this is great, I'm glad that you're doing this. I think that The College of Comm is fantastic and having a little more structure is never a bad thing. Especially as I said before, journalism, public relations, communications, it's not limited. Oh that something I did want to say. I think that there should be some kind of... I don't know how to approach this... but I when I graduated I had high morale, I had awesome experience in PR but getting a job in PR was the hardest and most discouraging thing ever. To the point where myself, and I know you talked to (past participant) today, but it sucks to be quite honest. You have all of your Smeal friends that have a job two years before graduation and then you're struggling to get a job two months before. Then you get an internship getting \$10 an hour. Somewhere along the curriculum someone should set an expectation of what the job market is like. There are a ton of PR agencies that are going to hire you as an intern and make you work six to seven months before hiring you with a substantial salary. So that needs to be... I was blindsided by that after graduation. I couldn't job into a corporate communications role, which is what I wanted to do.*

Oh yeah that's what I want to do and it's been troubling.

*Yeah it's rough and there are some programs with Dow and J&J coming on campus and doing the leadership development things but that's it. You can't walk into a job as a grad from one of the best College of Communications in the country.*

So preparing students for that reality?

*Right and figuring out ways, for me at least, I'm at a job now where I would have loved after graduation but it took me three years. But I think working at an agency for three years... you know you have to figure out what you want to do before you get to your goal. So setting your expectations for more of a realistic career path is doing something like working at an agency for three years then doing something else. So keeping that in mind somewhere.*

No I feel like I can incorporate that in like a potential class in the networking class... like preparing for public relations career and not so much as the academic side. But studying how the College operates, I've seen how they respect alumni insight so much. So that's why I'm looking forward to sharing this research project. I don't know if it would spark any change but maybe it could spark potential research. And your answers were so thoughtful and helpful.

*Yeah I think this is a fantastic initiative and sometimes people get caught up in taking their classes and graduating but the College of Comm has a lot of resources that are untapped so this is good.*

Well thank you!

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: F-Consumer Marketing-3/18/2015*

Ok so thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today. You were really receptive and I appreciate that. To give you a little road map, I'm going to start with some general information. Next I'll ask you about your Penn State education and early career. Finally I will ask you to think about how you would mentor an undergraduate pursuing a similar career path. And I just want to let you know that everything we discuss will be confidential and you are welcome to skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

*Cool.*

Ok thank you. So can you share your graduation year, major and minor?

*I graduated in 2012. I was a PR major and I minored in sociology.*

Great. And what was your first job, title and company, after graduation?

*I was an Account Services Intern at a small agency in Pittsburgh called Fitting Group.*

Ok and what is your current job title and company?

*Right now I am a Social Insight Associate at 113 Industries.*

And today I would like to talk about consumer marketing, is that still ok with you?

*Sure.*

Ok starting with your education, can you tell me about your decision to major in public relations at Penn State?

*So I originally went into public relations to get into media relations. I've been a big sports fan my whole life and I always wanted to do media relations for a big team or league, something like that. Then while I went through college, close to my graduation date, I lived through the Sandusky Scandal and I got more and more turned off by media relations. And I started to gear my studies and everything more toward social media, advertising and account services. So I took on the normal, required classes for PR but internships were more marketing focused.*

Wonderful. So when and why did you decide to pursue your marketing focus. Was it around graduation?

*Well my internships my sophomore and junior year were in the marketing department at a pharmaceutical company. I ended up loving it because I go to work with the agency and that's what turned me onto the marketing side of PR.*

Great. Now can you tell me about a time your education prepared you at work?

*No matter if you're at an agency or whatever, you're always expected to write a press release. One of the bosses at my old job just handed me information and told me to write a press release. And the fact that I have done it about a thousand times at school, which meant I didn't have any questions, and if I hadn't I wouldn't have been screwed.*

Glad you felt prepared for that! Now the flipside of this conversation, can you tell me about a time you felt unprepared for a public relations task?

*Yeah! One of the things I never got to study or experience was media pitching, actually getting on a phone and talking to reporters. If you're in a PR agency you're going to do more social media than you would be doing media relations, but once in a while it does come up. And your boss will expect you to pitch to a reporter. And I had no practice or experience in that.*

Yeah. I have actually heard that answer a few times. Do you have any ideas of how students could practice that in class?

*I would say that since Penn State has such an incredible student newspaper, pair with the Collegian or even just the journalism school, talk to the people that would be getting those pitches. When you're calling five years down the line or even pairing with a local State College newspaper...because a lot of the teachers I had used to be reporters and have that contact. So setting up a project where you have a really hard piece to pitch. Not something that a reporter would automatically cling to, but a story you really have to sell.*

Ok great that's an awesome idea thanks. Can you describe a skill you think consumer marketing would value more than another communications field?

*To be in consumer marketing you have to be innovative, a little bit more of an open minded person. Corporate communications tends to be pretty regulated and they have rules, standards, things they have to go by. Whereas if you're at an agency there are times they want that pie in the sky idea that they can reopen into something more reasonable and doable. You have to be a little more innovative and very open-minded because people are going to come with crazy ideas to you and you will be like "that's never going to happen." But you have to figure out how to make it happen. Especially if it's your boss saying "this is what we're doing."*

Right. So this last section is on curriculum design. If you were mentoring an undergraduate student pursuing a career in consumer marketing, what would you suggest to major and minor in?

*I would probably suggest majoring in Ad/PR and they definitely need to take classes in both. Because if you're going to start in marketing there is a benefit in taking PR classes and getting AP Style drilled in your head. And I would definitely suggest, it depends what you want to do, but I work in in consumer insight. So having that sociology minor was super helpful. But if you're going into account services or project management side, I would say they need to minor in advertising for that budgeting background and financial background.*

Ok. And if you were mentoring the same undergraduate student pursuing a job in consumer marketing, what skill would you emphasize as the most important in fostering during their academic career?

*Time management overall. And the ad agency of an agency is extremely hectic. You're expected to do 80 hours' worth of work in 40 hours as opposed to corporate where you have as much time as you want. In an agency, you have to bill your time to your clients. No matter how much work you have to get done, you have to do it in the allotted time. So time management is huge, being able to balance multiple things at once.*

Great. So if you were designing a consumer marketing concentration in public relations, what types of classes would you make mandatory?

*That's a good question. I would definitely do a research and analytics course. Unfortunately the one at Penn State, at least when I was there, was very mass focused. It didn't really focus on research methods and analyzing data beyond just numbers. So I would definitely say they need a stronger course and that would be mandatory. Even if you're not in consumer insights but you're in account services, you will be handed a research report and have to figure out what to do with it. I would say they should really have a timeline and budget building class. Find out how long it takes an agency and how to bill. Timelines and estimates based on client budgets would be a big one.*

Yeah those are great answers. This last question is, if given the opportunity to enroll in one additional PR class and one additional elective class today, what would you take and why?  
*I would probably re-take the social media and PR course. I took it in college and I think it was the first year it was really offered. And it was weak, now working in PR for the last three years. It by no means was where it's supposed to be but I wonder by now it should be a bit better. Now an elective...*

It can be in a different college.

*I would say marketing in Smeal. I never got to take a business course, everything I learned about business was from work.*

Ok! Great so that concludes my interview. You were thinking fast on your feet so this was a fast one but your answers were thoughtful so thank you!

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: D-Consumer Marketing-2/18/2015*

Just to give you an idea of what we're going to talk about, I'm going to start with some general information, then move on to your early career and education, and then ask how you would mentor a student pursuing a similar career path to yours.

*Ok.*

I also want to remind you that your responses to these questions will be confidential and you are welcome to skip any question you prefer not to answer.

*Ok.*

Ok. So what was your graduation year?

*May 2012.*

And what was your major and your minor?

*So I majored in advertising and public relations and I minored in business.*

Ok great and you were the public relations option right?

*Yes.*

So what was your first job, title and company, after graduation?

*So my first job after graduation was for a digital advertising agency called GoldSpot Media and my position was marketing and communications coordinator.*

Ok. And what's your current job, the title and company?

*So I currently work for a high-end fashion brand called Andrew Marc and my title is marketing and e-commerce manager.*

Alright. So what I'm trying to do with this research project is pinpoint your specialty within public relations so I can get your feedback and use it to customize your curriculum to that. So would you say that your specialty is consumer marketing?

*Um, yes.*

So how did you decide to major in public relations at Penn State?

*Well I first came to Penn State I was undecided. I really didn't know what I wanted to do. So I talked to my adviser and she thought I had great communication skills and that I was outgoing with great interpersonal skills. So she said that PR would be perfect for me. I took the PR class and then I decided that I'm a good writer, outspoken so I figured I wanted to help people and work with people. So that's how I decided on going with PR. As far as my minor goes, I knew I wanted to work in the business realm and I thought it would help me be well rounded.*

Yeah that makes sense with your skill set. So when and why did you decide to pursue consumer marketing specifically?

*So I think for me I didn't really like pitching to editors and writing press releases. That kind of happened after graduation, after my first job. My first job, even though my title was marketing and communications coordinator, it was more geared toward PR. It was tailored to a lot of outreach. So I enjoyed writing but I was writing from a technical standpoint and in my previous*

*experiences at Penn State and in internships, it was more fashion based and things that I was more interested in. So with my first job I was turned away from PR. I wanted to do something more marketing and product focused. Before I started looking for a new job, I knew I wanted it to be in marketing and more consumer based. Working in fashion, I felt like I understand that consumer better since I am that target audience. With Andrew Marc, our consumer base is anyone between college students to middle-aged men and women. I wanted to get away from the writing aspect and work more with people and merchandising and understanding the product because I could relate to it better.*

Yeah seems like your dream job now then!

*Yeah! Definitely took a lot of work but I'm so happy I am here I am now.*

Congratulations!

*Thanks!*

So can you tell me about a time you felt your education prepared you for a time at work? Maybe like a specific assignment?

*I think to be honest the best thing that... I don't know if it was my education but it was from Penn State... when I was a senior at school I was a Fashion Stylist for Valley Magazine, and I did Happy Valley Communications, and I did a sports internship with Penn State football, all while taking a full load of classes. So for me, at my job now, being at school helped me balance and keep organized. And with my job now I have so many responsibilities as far as marketing and the website. I run the e-commerce business at Andrew Marc. So relating back to Penn State, I think that it was more about juggling different responsibilities all at once that helped me with my current work. When I was interviewed for the job it was very important to my boss that I was self-sufficient. I could do multiple things and multi-task and handle things under pressure. So having all of those experiences at school and managing a 3.7 GPA spoke for itself. What I learned in the classroom was important, but those experiences through internships and Valley Magazine, being able to style an entire magazine, was really important to my job now because I merchandise the website. So a lot of my experiences from Penn State I am thankful for come from my extracurricular activities. I want to say for my first job, it was definitely my PR classes and helping me with writing, writing press releases. I used that a lot and referenced my old work. I'm trying to think of the class, the one by XXX...*

So that one class you're talking about is the PR writing class?

*Yeah it was specific to PR writing. And that helped me in my first job because the main focus of was press releases and public service announcements. So I was able to take those lessons and apply it to my first job.*

Ok yeah! That's a really thoughtful answer thank you!

*No problem.*

So this is kind of the flip side. Can you think of a time you felt unprepared for a public relations assignment?

*Umm. I feel like when I first started at my first job they didn't have any type of PR. So going into that I just wasn't prepared because I didn't have the connections that they wish I had. So like starting out I didn't have connections that I feel like.... I wasn't prepared. I didn't have a contact at the New York Times.*

Yeah you didn't have that network yet.

*Yeah. If I was able to take a semester off and do an internship in New York, if I had that opportunity, I feel like it might have helped me feel more prepared in my career. Which is hard to say, because everything that you learn at your job, you basically learn at your job. Maybe 10 percent of what I did at Penn State is probably applied to my job now. All of the different platforms I use at my job now, everything I do, I learned at my current job. You know?*

*Yeah there's a lot of training there.*

*Yeah I don't know if that answers your question though! Oh, actually now come to think of it... so my boss, at my first job, asked me to put together a case study using Photoshop. And I know being a part of the PR major they don't stress Photoshop enough. I tried to reach out to a couple of professors at Penn State to see I could do Photoshop and they really don't have a class that pertains to Photoshop. So the one thing I wish I could have taken at Penn State would be a class dedicated to Photoshop. That's so important just to have on the creative background. Beginning in PR, people want case studies and stuff like that. So you need to know Photoshop. I wasn't prepared for that, I really didn't know how to do it when asked.*

*Definitely. Ok so now I'll ask more specific questions to consumer marketing. So can you describe a skill you think consumer marketing values more than other communications jobs?*

*What do you mean?*

*Like in contrast to corporate communications, social media, a skill unique to consumer marketing is... what?*

*Well my job is a little bit tied to social media because I am responsible for that too. But I think a skill you really need for marketing is to multi-task. To manage up too. With my job now, my boss really relies on me to manage the Andrew Marc brand. So I think that it's being able to multi-task and manage the brand, as opposed to pitching news. I'm managing a website and merchandising things. Working so everything flows properly. Does that answer your question?*

*Yes everything you've said has been helpful! So let's talk about curriculum design. If you were going to mentor an underclassman pursuing a career path similar to yours in consumer marketing, what would you suggest to major and minor in?*

*Well for what I do now I think it would probably be best to major in marketing with maybe a minor in PR and communications. But I think that it all depends on what you want to do. I have friends that are merchandisers for Macy's and Gap and American Apparel and they all have majors in marketing and minored in PR. I had friends who majored in supply chain who now working human resources at Ernst and Young. So I think with consumer marketing you definitely want to major in marketing and minor in PR, because it's always good to have those communication skills. But I think that if you want to work in a PR agency or a communications firm, then it's important to them that you're major in PR over marketing just because when you want to work in an agency or communications firm they are looking for that major to know that you have the right skills. You're going to be more client focused than a marketing major who is more consumer focused, not directly working with the client.*

*Makes sense. Ok and then if we do keep this within the College of Comm but keep it a concentration within PR, what kind of classes would you make mandatory?*

*Within the PR major?*

*Yeah but for someone that wants to work in PR and marketing.*

*Writing is important for any marketing or PR job. PowerPoint, Photoshop and Excel are super important. Like I said, everything I do now I learned at my job with the different platforms we use.*

When you say platforms, which are you referring to?

*We work with a platform called Magenta and that basically is the backend of our website. So I basically upload every single Andrew Marc product to Excel then upload to Magenta, which is a website company. I basically just run the website through that platform. But I didn't learn that at Penn State I learned it on the job. Another important thing would be having a class, I'm trying to think of a word my intern uses where she goes to college, and she has a class where they basically pick their dream job. So say if I was at Penn State still and my dream job was to work at Tory Burch. I would research the company to figure out why I like the company, and why I want to work there. So maybe a class that focused on doing a campaign on your dream job, maybe? I don't know if that's stupid!*

No, no. I have teachers that will let you pick your client for a capstone class but that's a good point, to get familiar with the decision making process behind it.

*Yeah I think it's so important to network and knowing all of that... when I met with XXX he stressed to me how important networking is. The skills that I feel like I needed, people just assumed I was good at. You know, PowerPoint, Excel... and I was good at those and they are so important. I just feel like in the College of Comm they don't stress those enough. Me, personally, I wish I had more of a grasp on Photoshop like I mentioned before.*

Yeah there's difference between using a platform and actually knowing the ins-and-out of it.

*Exactly. I just feel like a lot of my experiences came from outside the classroom. And I know that my intern, who I'm friends with, her college makes it mandatory that you do an internship. It would be cool if Penn State could give you a class that would count as 3-4 credits and have that count as class time. I think internship is important and it should be built into the curriculum.*

*Other candidates you're competing against in the real world, they want to see how many internship you had and how you can apply the skill you learned at that internship to another job.*

Yeah so stressing that hands-on experience as well.

*Exactly. Building those credits into part of the curriculum.*

Ok one more question. So it's one of the more random ones and you kind of touched on it. But if you were given the opportunity to enroll in one additional PR class and one additional elective class today, what would you want to take and why? I know you said Photoshop.

*I definitely would want a Photoshop class. A class that stresses Photoshop, Excel, PowerPoint. And then...*

It can be from another college, too.

*Maybe I could go back and take a computer science class. Just because I think it's good to understand computer since that's what I'm on every day. I pretty much understand them but maybe a computer science class that's specially tailored to Photoshop, Excel, and PowerPoint. Everything that I have learned is on the job. Same with a lot of my friends too, they learned on the job or at internships.*

So that's the exposure you got a lot out of?

*Yeah exactly.*

Well that concludes my interview, thank you very much!

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: B-Consumer Marketing- 2/23/2015*

Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today, it's nice that I know you and had our experience together with PRSSA. I'm looking forward to picking your brain! I'll start with some general information questions, then ask about your education and early career, then finish with mentoring scenarios about a student pursuing a similar career path.

*Yeah, ok!*

And I just want to remind you that your response to all of these questions will be confidential. You are welcome to skip any questions that you prefer not to answer.

*Ok.*

Great. So what was your graduation year?

*2012.*

And your major and minor?

*Public relations major and minors in sociology and recreation, park and tourism management.*

Ok so what was your first job, title and company, after graduation?

*So I went to Morpheus as a display media intern. Then I moved to a social media internship and got hired full time on their social media team.*

Great, so what's your current job now? Are you still there?

*No I just left. I started as Marketing Coordinator at Armani Exchange in December.*

Awesome. So my goal of this research is to identify your discipline within public relations then use that information to create academic plans by highlighting the skills and courses you found most useful that students pursuing your career path would also benefit from. So far I've interviewed on social/digital media, media relations and consumer marketing. It sounds like you're in consumer marketing now at Armani?

*Yeah.*

Ok we will come back to that. But now can you tell me about your decision to major in public relations at Penn State?

*So I knew that I wanted to do something with communications. I always enjoyed writing and public relations is very writing-driven, as I'm sure you know. So that's why I picked that. There was really no career goal set in mind. It was just one of those things where you think it's a good fit for a major.*

Totally. So when and why did you decide to pursue this marketing route in fashion, like you did with Armani?

*So I always had an interest in fashion and the agency I went to right after school...well I had no idea I was going to end up in digital media agency. So my first position was a lot of media buying and display media in digital. All of my clients the whole time I was at Morpheus, even when I was in social media, were in fashion. So I kind of got to get that background even though*

*it was an internship. You don't always get to have a background in things you're interested in, but that internship gave me a platform to push me off of and end up on the client side.*

Yeah that's awesome. I feel like corporate communications is the goal but you have to start at agencies, at least from what I've heard.

*Yeah funny enough I thought that too. But out of everyone on this team, there are only two of us that have any agency background, which really surprised me.*

Yeah, interesting. Now can you tell me about a time you felt your education prepared you at work?

*When you end up in an agency especially, you'll realize that not everyone has a major that pertains to the job they're doing. So I ended up being the only person on my team who knew how to write a press release. And it wasn't a big part of my job because I was on the social media team, and that's not what I had to do on a daily basis, but that skill came through for a client when their team was bogged down with fashion week and their team needed help with some of the smaller press releases. They sent those over and I went through them. We put in a lot of time into those at school so those were one of the times I knew my public relations major helped out a lot.*

Definitely. And then can you think of a time when your general education may have prepared you at work?

*I think that Penn State gives you a good background, in all of your undergraduate courses, in giving you a well-rounded business mindset.*

So a big picture idea?

*Yeah.*

Awesome. Can you describe a time you felt unprepared for a public relations assignment?

*So this might have changed since I left, because of the way the whole industry has shifted, but as far as any digital public relations goes I really had no educational background in that. That was something I got into on my own and looked into while I was in school. And just being in the industry you can tell that even if you're not at a digital agency, it's something that you need to have an understanding of.*

Like what specifically? Platforms or writing?

*No how to deal with influencers, bloggers, media sites are becoming more and more important. How to deal with those people and work around what your goals are, they're a little bit different on digital. When writing campaigns that was never really taught.*

Ok thanks for clarifying. So can you describe a skill that you think your consumer marketing specialty values more than another communications field?

*Consumer marketing is kind of very different from public relations. I work a lot with our public relations team and you'll realize that coming out of school with that PR mindset of getting the press and getting the word out, but consumer marketing is doing that then realizing you have to take the press out of it. So it's how you're going to get that consumer, how you're going to relate with them. I think anyone that wants to get into consumer marketing should minor in sociology, because I relied on that quite a bit.*

Makes sense. Ok then so this last section is just on curriculum design. If you were going to mentor an undergraduate student pursuing a similar job to yours at Armani, what would you suggest to major in minor in? So you just said sociology.

*Yeah definitely minor in sociology. I mean the major public relations helped me a lot. The writing side of it has been great because I can help out our copywriter and really understand that side as well. And then because of how the advertising/PR major is set up, we lead with a little bit better with a creative background I'd say, more so than other PR majors come out with.*

So if you were mentoring an undergraduate student pursuing a job in consumer marketing, what skill would you emphasize as most important in fostering?

*I don't know if it's one skill that can be taught, but I would just emphasize that there's a lot I had to learn on the job and being prepared for that. I work in digital marketing, print media, outdoor media and social media all at the same time. So I think touching on each types of different media in one curriculum would be really important to at least kind of give an overall picture of what goes into that.*

A well-rounded exposure?

*Yeah. I'm making a media plan and at the same time working on a social media content calendar. Then turning around and working with a fashion website to create content about us on their page.*

Wow. So if you were designing a concentration in consumer marketing, what types of courses would you want to make mandatory? They don't have to actually exist.

*I remember my client relations course that overlapped with advertising has helped me tremendously. That's not required for PR students but I definitely would recommend it. It was a huge help especially because people end up in an agency, whether you're in account management or running the media, whatever you're doing, you have to work with clients. And then at the same time we got to create so many different campaigns and get practice presenting them like you were presenting them to a client. And you don't really get that a lot in classes.*

Yeah I totally agree and it's important.

*And then XXX's class, it was my senior year I can't remember...*

Was it the capstone class?

*We spent pretty much the whole semester on one campaign. Which in the real world, you don't get that much time. But for a class, it was great. You got to really dive into it, two people doing all of the work.*

Yeah! And so both of these classes you like how they highlight the client aspect, it sounds like?

*Yeah and you really get to do the work for it. One of the things I didn't like about Penn State was that it took the beginning of junior year until I was actually writing a press release, which is just really late for PR to do that. But those two classes were great I use them a lot.*

That's great to hear. And this last question is, if you were given the opportunity to enroll in one additional PR class and one additional elective class today, which course would you like to take and why?

*I think that it's because I'm in a digital background and I was kind of jealous when I went to Success in the City and these kids were talking to me and telling me that they were taking classes in AdWords and run search campaigns, stuff I never knew we could take. So I would take that as an elective, even though I don't think it was a part of PR. Or maybe a coding class...something*

*that would give you a leg up in digital. As far as PR class, I would take a class that teaches you how to deal with influencers and the entrepreneurial part of it because they could not be more different than dealing with the media.*

That's a great answer. So those different people you could be potentially working for?

*I mean a lot of the A-list bloggers, people like that, are self-made and there's such a range from the person who just started a year ago and suddenly getting all of this coverage to the people who have been doing this for years with a main brand around them. You can tell that they're learning on their own, and just the range of things you will get to work with between them is insane.*

Thanks those were such creative answers! And that actually concludes my interview.

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: F-Consumer Marketing-3/2/2015*

So first I'm going to get some general information. Then I'll ask you questions about your education and early career. Finally I'll ask you about mentoring scenarios for students pursuing a similar career path.

*Sure.*

And I just want to remind you that all of your responses to these questions are confidential and you are welcome to skip any question you prefer not to answer.

*Ok!*

So what was your graduation year, major and minor?

*It was May 2014. My major was PR and one of my minors was English and the other was international studies.*

So what was your first job after graduation- the title and company?

*It was Account Coordinator at Weber Shandwick.*

And that's where you still are now?

*Now I'm an Assistant Account Executive, still at Weber Shandwick.*

That's awesome

*Thanks!*

So what aspect of public relations would you prefer to reflect on today: media relations, consumer marketing, or digital/social media?

*I do a mix between media relations and consumer marketing. So it depends on your questions.*

Let's just pick about consumer marketing, because I've talked to less people about that.

*Yeah that's fine.*

Thanks. So please tell me about your decision to major in PR at Penn State.

*Well my sophomore year I took both the Introduction to Advertising and Introduction to Public Relations. I took them at the same time, but I was better at my PR class and more interested in it. I got involved in Happy Valley Communications, where I got hands-on experiences. And I did internships. So I excelled more in that field than advertising, so that's why I chose PR.*

Ok. So how did you get on this consumer marketing route?

*Well I knew I wanted to start my career at a large agency and I knew that Weber Shandwick had national clients and they're well known in the industry. So it's a great place to start out just because I can work on a lot of huge clients at once. And it's a great environment for starting out.*

Awesome. So can you tell me about a time you felt your education prepared you at work?

*Yeah, let me think. Well definitely with Happy Valley Communications, Penn State's student-run PR firm, I was an Account Executive my senior year for HVC and it enabled me to do a lot of hands-on experience. So as a result, I was prepared for Weber Shandwick in terms of pitching media, how to write pitches, and things of that nature.*

So it was more Happy Valley Communications than courses?

*Yeah honestly to be completely frank, the courses help you with your writing skills and give a good overview the field. But when you're actually doing PR and doing examples of it, that's the most beneficial of it. So the course were great but actually doing PR was most beneficial.*

Well that's good to note. Can you describe a time you felt unprepared for a public relations task?  
*Let me think. Starting out in PR, it is a lot of tasks you don't really expect. For instance, right now I have a campaign going on for Thomas the Tank Engine, it's one of our Fisher Price campaigns. It launched today with Neil Patrick Harris' Funny or Die video. So what I had to do was go over all the covers, report to my superiors by noon, hyperlink it. It was very time consuming but they need it now they need it fast. And nothing can prepare you with that. You just have to learn how to work fast and work efficiently at the same time under a stressful environment.*

So now can you describe a skill you think is important if you're trying to work in consumer marketing?

*I would say just being collaborative. It's really important to be creative and do ideas that haven't done before. And when you're in a new environment and working with people with different backgrounds, connectivity is crucial in creating a new idea for a new campaign that will be successful.*

Awesome. So this last section is just on curriculum design. If you were a mentor to an undergraduate student pursuing a job in consumer marketing, what would you suggest to major and minor in?

*I don't think you can double major in advertising and PR, so maybe if you could double major in marketing and PR. I don't know if you can do that, but if you can you should do it. And if you can't, then take as many marketing classes as you can in a business minor. Because that really helps with well-roundedness and I wish I took a few more marketing classes than I did.*

Ok makes sense. So if you were mentoring the same undergraduate student, what types of courses would you want to emphasize that they take? You said marketing classes, but can you think of any others?

*Actually I though the social media class we took was really beneficial. Even though it's not consumer marketing, consumer marketing does work really close with social. It's good to have knowledge on that. I think that should be a required for all communications students, because even if you're not in PR it's a beneficial class.*

Yeah! Do any others stick out in your mind?

*Do they have to exist?*

No!

*Let's see. I know we have a PR campaigns class, so definitely that. I don't know if they have a marketing campaigns class but that would be beneficial since marketing and PR goes hand-in-hand. But I don't think there is one.*

I'll have to look into that! So my last question is if you were given the opportunity to enroll in one additional PR class and one additional elective class today, what would you take and why?  
*One PR class and one elective?*

Yeah it can even be in another college and you're going back today.

*So for my PR class I think it would be beneficial if there was a pitching class. Because in PR, you're doing a lot of pitching, but pitches vary so much depending on who you're reaching out to. And you have to tweak each pitch individually and you'll spend a lot of time on them. And a lot of people will just send a mass pitch out, but you won't get the same results. So it would be helpful to have a whole media relations class with pitching being a huge part of it. And for an elective, a business math class. Not a class where you have to do math, because in PR you really don't have to do that much. But in marketing, you don't do hard math but you have to understand it. So it's not hands-on equations but comprehending common math that takes place in the business world.*

So what kind of math are you exposed to? Statistics?

*Now I'm not, but at a higher level maybe a year or two there's a lot of budgeting for a campaign and for initiatives under those campaigns. So budget is a big issue especially with national clients that will throw you multimillion dollars a year. They'll want to know exactly what you'll do with that money before they give it to you, so you have to be able to break it down.*

Those are great. I've actually heard those two a lot so you can see what professionals think is missing in the curriculum.

*Yeah!*

Thanks so much for helping me! That concludes my interview.

## Social/Digital Media

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: M-Social Media-1/29/2015*

I really appreciate you taking time out of your day to share your public relations knowledge and experiences. You've always been a great resource for me and I feel very lucky. So first, I'd like to get some general information. Next, I'm going to ask you a few questions about your career, starting with your education at Penn State through your current work. Then finally, I'll ask you to think about how you would mentor future students following a similar career path. I just want to remind you that your responses to all of these questions will be confidential and you are welcome to skip any specific questions that you prefer not to answer. Ok?

*Cool.*

Ok, so what was your graduation year again?

*2012*

Major?

*Public relations.*

Minor?

*Spanish.*

Ok, and what was your first job, title and company, after graduation?

*I worked at ComeRecommended, an online company. And you know how to spell that right? And my title was senior content creator.*

And what's your title at Care2?

*I am the Activism Marketing and Social media manager.*

Ok great, and would you describe that, within the public relations industry, as the nonprofit sector or more social media?

*No it is private sector but all of our clients are nonprofit.*

Ok thanks. So I am going to talk about your education and early career. Can you tell me about your decision to major in public relations at Penn State?

*I've always been interested in writing as a career and I knew it was something I would like to do as a career. I can see myself writing all day. So I started majoring in journalism and joined the student newspaper. But I soon found it was a bit too stressful. Journalism requires erratic hours and a really strict adherence to accuracy that I found really stressful. So I made the switch to public relations because journalism requires you to be without bias. But I saw myself, as I was reading the news, developing a lot of opinions on things. So I decided I wanted a career where I could be an advocate for something, rather than just a filter for information. And public relations allows me to do that so I switched.*

Right. So when and why did you decide to pursue what you're doing now at Care2 specifically?

*I would say within the last two years of my college career, I started to get involved with campus activism, a lot of activist groups on campus. I decided that if I could merge my PR career with*

*advocacy in that way then that would be ideal. So that's what ultimately led me to join Care2, which is a petition site that's also focused on advocacy.*

Ok. Now can you tell me about a time you felt your education at Penn State prepared you at work?

*Prepared me?*

Yeah are there any examples in mind that you have for when your education prepared you?

*Oh yeah! I mean, in every possible way. I think one of the main things that sticks out is that I wouldn't have learned how to write concisely without my classes at Penn State. And that's really critical for working in media. I see a lot of people who are new to public relations. They didn't study it in college but seek careers in it. Maybe they studied English or something—but their writing is not concise.*

Wonderful example. Now can you think of a time when your general education, not specifically a public relations class, prepared you at work?

*The classes that weren't PR focused helped me to explore what kind of organizations I wanted to advocate for and do public relations for. So I took the Media and Democracy class and a sociology class that really shaped my worldview. This helped me to see that I wanted to merge public relations with all of the other things I was learning in school in terms of social justice, politics, and things like that.*

Great. Can you describe a time you felt that you were unprepared for a public relations assignment?

*For an assignment in my career or for school?*

In your career, was there a PR task and you just didn't know how to do it?

*Yeah, I guess I sort of felt that my classes didn't prepare me for public speaking enough. I had one required public speaking course and I know that there is a PR class, XXX's, upper level public relations class, it teaches you crisis communications and about holding a crisis communications class. But I didn't get to take that class. I think that really like scared me when it came to crisis communications and answering reporter question when you're in the hot seat.*

Ok, thank you. And one more question for this section. And I'm sorry I'm still having trouble pinpointing your discipline within public relations. I'm trying to divide public relations disciplines or specialties within PR... What would you put your career as?

*It's pretty heavily social media.*

Ok thank you, sorry I just had to figure that out. Can you think of a skill that social media values more than other communications fields?

*A skill that social media values more than other communications fields?*

Yes, other communication fields.

*Oh other communication fields. Umm, I need to think about that one. I might say that it has a customer service aspect. You have to be able to communicate with everyday people who are commenting on a Facebook post or tweeting at you. And in other communications fields you're dealing with journalists or CEOs, not the general public. But in social media you have to be able to deal with the general public and that can be kind of challenging.*

Ok great, thank you. And this last question is just on curriculum design. So if you were going to mentor an underclassman pursuing a job in social media, what would you suggest to major and minor in?

*In social media? I would definitely say that they should major in public relations. And I don't think it is possible to minor in journalism but maybe take some journalism classes. Another thing to minor in would be any field you're interested in. Whether its economics, finance, sociology, psychology, health and human services...any other pairing, a public relations major with any another industry minor, is great because you can really tailor your career to communications work in any of those fields.*

That's a good point. And you kind of answered this, but what other kinds of courses, whether in public relations or across campus, would you suggest.

*Sorry you cut out, what was the question?*

What additional courses, whether PR or across other Colleges, would you suggest. So you mentioned journalism?

*Yes, definitely journalism. Also, I mean, I feel like journalism is paramount but other than that you should just be whatever you're interested in. Like, whatever classes in an industry you would be comfortable doing PR for companies in that industry.*

Got it. Now if you were mentoring a student pursuing a job in social media, what skill would emphasize as the most important in fostering?

*Hmm. I kind of want to say concision again. Because in social media you're... obviously like Twitter has character limits Facebook post perform better if there's less text...so being about to communicate in a concise way.*

Ok, two more questions. If you were designing a PR concentration for social media what types of course would you make mandatory?

*I'm going to go back and say a journalism or newswriting class. Also a research class or a statistics class simply because on social media you're often interpreting data, scientific reports, there can be a lot of misinformation on social media so a research or statistics class would help you be able to assess what information you should trust.*

Ok great. Now the last question. If you were able to enroll in one additional PR class and one additional elective class today, what two courses would you like to take and why?

*Two courses?*

One PR and one elective that you would want to take.

*One of them would be probably XXX's class, I don't even remember what it's called. That would be the one for PR because sometimes I feel unprepared for high pressure moment in PR, like if there's a crisis or breaking news and I have to respond. Or if journalists call and I have no preparation but I have to answer their questions. And then an elective course... it doesn't have to do with PR but I would like to take an economics course. Because I think it would be interesting. And I didn't get to take any classes like that. And when you get into the real world you're dealing with real businesses, you need to understand economics, so yeah and any econ or business course.*

Wonderful! Now that concludes my interview. Thank you so much for sharing your insight with me.

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: F-Social/Digital Media-2/12/2015*

Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today. I know you're really busy. I really appreciate you taking time out of your day to share your public relations knowledge and expertise. First, I'd like to get some general information. Next, I'm going to ask you a few questions about your career, starting with your education at Penn State through your current work. Lastly I'll ask you to think about how you would mentor future students following a similar career path.

*Ok.*

Ok, great. I just want to remind you that your responses to all of these questions will be confidential and you are welcome to skip any specific questions that you prefer not to answer.

*Ok cool. No problem.*

Ok so when did you graduate, what year was it?

*It was May 2013.*

And your major?

*I was a dual major in psychology and public relations.*

Oh wow, and did you have a minor or did the two majors keep you busy enough.

*No, no minors.*

Makes sense. And what was your first job, title and company, after graduation?

*My first job was a paid internship for a Social Media Coordinator and the company was International Tourism Management, but we represented Elegant Hotels, which has five luxury hotels in Barbados and did their social media.*

Wow, and are you still there?

*No, I switched in July I got a better job at one of the top ranked marketing firms in south Florida. It's Brand Internet Marketing. I actually just got promoted in January too. And I'm in the marketing coordinator position. I'm doing more PR work now on top of social media but I basically run the social media department. I don't do any of the postings. I handle all the press releases, blog content, and work like that.*

Ok wow that's interesting because my whole focus of this interview is to pinpoint what your specialty and then make recommended academic plans for current students pursuing a similar career path as you. So would you say that your specialty is digital and social?

*Yeah I would definitely say more Internet based. My main specialty is writing because I handle the content. But it's more digital than print.*

Ok so let's just talk about your education. Tell me about your decision to major in PR at Penn State.

*I originally started out in journalism and then I guess you can say I was kind of influenced by the job market and the pay wasn't very good at the time so I switched to public relations. At the end*

*of it, I was glad I switched. I really enjoyed public relations a lot more than I think I would have enjoyed journalism.*

And then so how did you decide to pursue this digital/social route after graduation?

*Well I mean I think that I've always been into social media personally. I think I started out wanting to get out there and do something fun with hotels and the restaurant business. I worked in restaurants my entire life so I was really interested in the social media aspect of it. Engaging with users, stuff like that. I wanted to move to Florida, to get away from the cold, so I searched jobs and I got offered a paid internship for three months. Then they hired me full-time so I couldn't really say no.*

Yeah I bet. And then can you tell me about a time you felt your education prepared you at work?

*Like a specific task? Yeah honestly right now I can tell you COMM 420 totally prepared me for the job I had now. I know the instructor was XXX and she was amazing. It was very demanding and that's how my job is now. I think it prepared me for so many reasons. There was an assignment due every day and that prepared me to meet deadlines and prioritize tasks.*

Can you also think of a time when your general education curriculum prepared you at work?

*I mean it kind of always goes back to time management as the best thing. It taught me personal skills to like how to interact with clients or internal team at work I think Penn State prepared me for that*

Awesome. Can you think of a time you were not prepared for a public relations assignment?

Like you were assigned a specific task and you just didn't know how to do it.

*I don't think they teach you enough platforms at Penn State. Especially with all of these new ones coming out. Not even so much social media but like email marketing. I mean there are situations where I've been told to put out a press release on a platform but I didn't learn about it at school so I would have to Google it and figure it out myself.*

What's the name of platform you didn't know about?

*Oh yeah I mean I didn't know about I think it was iNewswire and PR Newswire they didn't tell us about. Or PR web, one of those.*

Ok great. Can you describe a skill you think social/digital PR values more than other communication fields?

*I mean the online writing is very different than print writing. Even when it comes to press releases the format is different. You kind of have to know how to format your online press releases vs. your print press releases. That's a pretty big one. Then even when you're doing online like writing blogs. I think that print is a little more formal and digital you can get away with doing a little more informal, engaging with users. And that's the main thing. Increasing your online presence then reaching your audiences and knowing how audiences differ.*

And now this is just the last section, talking about curriculum design. So if you were a mentor to an undergraduate student pursuing a career in social/digital media, what would you suggest to major in?

*I would probably major in marketing. I think it covers pretty much all aspects around the whole media so I would major in marketing.*

Ok and would you suggest any minors?

*Yeah, I would do a minor in public relations. I would do a minor in public relations or advertising, but mainly public relations.*

And then, could you think of additional elective courses, whether within the marketing/public relations curriculum or in another college, that you would suggest because you think it would be helpful?

*I think that if they had this at the time, I don't know if they do now, but if they have a social media elective to get to know the platforms and market them, that would be great. And then any writing courses you can take I would suggest.*

Like specific to digital though? Because you said it was different than journalism?

*Yeah... I mean I think it's good to have both but if you're going strictly into digital then obviously that. But you can tailor it...if you're used to doing print... you can tailor your writing. Both are important, I would say.*

Alright! Then if you were designing... I know you said marketing would be a more appropriate major but if we did keep this in the College of Comm and made a public relations major with a specialty in digital and social, what types of courses would you make mandatory?

*Um, you're bringing me back.*

I know, I know.

*If I'm creating classes... a social media one. Covering all of those platforms. Then I would do a print writing class and a digital class. And I do think it's important, I know people hated the class and I hated the class, but ECON. At least one semester, you learn the business aspect of it and it does come in handy even when you're filling in your HR forms. I would say ECON.*

Ok great! And my last question is if you were giving the option to enroll in one public relations class and one elective class what two courses would you take and why?

*I don't even remember what was offered.*

Well just to build your knowledge, the class doesn't have to technically exist.

*If I could do a class it would be one extended off of COMM 420 basically including more digital aspects and not just print. It's just more focused on print so something more focused on digital.*

Like digital research? Analytics?

*Yeah. And I can't remember the name of the class but I took it and it was awesome, but if they did it under any type of major I would take it...basically you were separated in groups and you had a company you had to create from scratch. You came up with the Code of Ethics, things like that, product launches, you ended up having to get up and present it for the class and why you took that marketing schedule. It was COMM four hundred something.*

Ok! Well that includes my interview. Thank you for finding the time to talk to me!

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: K-Social/Digital Media-3/4/2015*

I really appreciate you taking the time out of your day to talk about your public relations education and work. Just to give you an idea about what we're talking about... I'm going to start with some general information, then ask about your education and early work, then ask you to think about how you would mentor an undergraduate student following a similar career path. And I just want to remind you that all of your responses to these questions are confidential and you are welcome to skip any question you prefer not to answer.

*Ok!*

Awesome. So what's your graduation year, major and minor?

*2014. My major was public relations and my minor was Spanish*

Ok and what was your first job, title and company, after graduation?

*Barnes and Nobles. Corporate communications.*

Wow and is that where you are now?

*Yes.*

And what's your position title?

*So I'm just a Corporate Communications Specialist, I do both internal and external.*

Ok well now I'm curious if I should talk to you about corporate communications or social/digital media. Only because I wanted to get into corporate communications, but I haven't spoken to anyone else that works in that area yet.

*I mean a pretty big part of my job involves social media and it's not like in school I really did anything to study corporate comm... So if we're going from school to what I do now I would probably be more comfortable talking about social and digital media.*

Ok yeah that's perfect then. Thanks for helping me wrap my head around that.

*No problem!*

So can you tell me about your decision to major in PR at Penn State?

*Sure, so I actually started as a broadcast journalism major. At the end of my freshman year I was kind of wondering about how good the field was and how likely it was that I was going to get a position doing exactly what I wanted to do. So instead of sticking with that I decided to broaden my options and at one point I thought about going to PR. It's an open field and there's a lot of things you can do with it. And in the end if I wanted to go back to the broadcast area it would still be possible with PR. PR gives you the freedom to do whatever you want.*

Totally. So when and why did you decide to take a job with digital and social media? What made you want to do that kind of work?

*So while I was at Penn State I had an internship with Penn State Undergraduate Admissions Office doing social media work with them. Also I was the Vice President of Communications on the PanHellenic Council and that was a lot of social media work. So I just kind of got used to it and I got comfortable with and it was fun. It allowed me to be creative, do some writing, and learn new technologies to bolster my resume. It was a combination of the three that got me*

*interested in it and kept me interested in it.*

Great, now still talking about your education, can you tell me about a time you felt your education prepared you for work?

*Yep actually a lot of my social media preparation came from, I don't know if you've had her, but XXX. So as a senior I took a social media course and basically what it was a rundown of how to make the most of your social media usage, whether you're working for your company or bolster your own image, like to brand yourself. So we learned anything from how to get the most followers to which filter to use to get the most likes. It was an all-inclusive course. And then I also took my capstone class with her in PR. Again I don't know the number, but she centered that class a lot on social media. Whether it was encouraging us to tweet daily or whether like... we had to keep a blog so we were supposed to be blogging about whatever we wanted but we had to be interested in writing and updating it to get ourselves out there. Also, in that class, she was a Google Glass Explorer. She would bring it to class and we could play with it during class. And our project was to make an app, not the technical stuff about it, but the concept part. So we were always doing stuff that was based around social and digital media and how to think in that way. Whether it was wearables or social media and whatever platforms we were using. Even when we had to do a campaign, our campaign was "how to make Happy Valley happier" and to help out with that we advertised a lot through Facebook and Twitter and used social media to contact certain vendors where we had to event and incorporate it in keeping people updated with our research status. So we did a lot of social media work with her because she was a big proponent of it.*

Yeah so it sounds like you've had an immersive experience then.

*Yeah for sure!*

So with the flipside of this question, can you think of a time you were not prepared for a public relations assignment?

*Sure. I probably have a lot but let me think of a specific time. I mean just in general I feel like earlier on in my classes, before my senior year, I still had a minimal concept of what public relations actually was and what is the difference between a media pitch and a media alert. I think a lot of it had to do with the wording of things and when to use each kind of thing that you're writing, like what are you using it for, how does it help get what you need to get in your work. So I think that maybe, a lot of the times our hands were held to this kind of stuff, but I think a lot in the beginning of my classes I had no idea how this stuff was applicable in the real world. I don't know if that exactly answers your question.*

No yeah it does. Like seeing the different kind of PR work and when they're used in the business or outside the classroom setting?

*Yeah exactly.*

Ok so the last question in this area is... can you think of a skill that social/digital work values more than another area of public relations? Like what's a skill that's necessary to excel in social/digital work? Does that make sense?

*Yeah. Let me just take a second to think.*

Ok!

*Like the first thing that came to mind, which I think applies to any type of public relations, was timeliness. Like if you have an event coming up and you have things you're trying to promote and*

*use social media to engage your followers with... ok let's go with engagement. That's something that's so important to have a hold of when working in social/digital media. You always want to be engaging your followers, your users, and your audience. It's your job to make sure that they know what is going on and know the message you're trying to portray. And I think that's really important for your brand. You need to engage your audience and you have to know your audience to do that. So, engagement!*

That's a good one. And now we're just going to talk about curriculum design. So if you were going to mentor an underclassman student pursuing a job in social/digital public relations, what would you suggest to major and minor in?

*I mean I would definitely suggest majoring in public relations. As a minor, I think you can go a lot of ways with that but it's funny because actually something that helped me, it wasn't one of my major or minor, but I took a lot of photography classes. They were photojournalists-based. Taking pictures and writing about them and knowing how to have an eye for that kind of stuff. And in a weird way that helped me in a creative sense. So maybe something photo-related.*

Yeah I love that idea. So what other type of elective classes would you recommend? It could be in other colleges too.

*I think any kind of technical classes where you can learn HTML and TSS are definitely very helpful. Um let me see. Like I said, those photo classes were a really great help. Also within the College, I took a feature writing course. Any writing course that teaches you different ways to write material will show you that there are ways in which you can present something new. Not everything has to be so cut and dry but do what you will.*

And if you were mentoring the same underclassmen student, what skill would you empathize as the most important in fostering? To have them really excel in that kind of work.

*I think just a general curiosity for all things social media. You have to know what's new and fresh in that industry. It's so important to know you industry especially in social and digital media because they're constantly changing. So if you don't know what's happening next then you're behind.*

Ok awesome. And you already touched on this but if you were designing a public relations concentration for social/digital media what kinds of classes would you make mandatory? You can repeat yourself.

*Yeah so that social media class taught by XXX was really helpful. I think maybe a class that specifically focused on branding yourself because I think that's a big thing right now. How people look at you especially when they're hiring. You know?*

Yes.

*So to find what you're interested in and how those things relate to like your social platforms. Something like that could be helpful.*

Yeah! And this last question is, if you were given the opportunity to enroll in one additional PR class and one additional elective class, which courses would you want to take and why?

*Hmm...*

I know! Well you can even make them up.

*Ok. Honestly... well the course I took junior year was supposed to be a crisis communications course but it didn't really feel like it. So something related to crisis communication something like that.*

*You took it with XXX?*

*Yeah I did but...*

*Something more intensive?*

*I didn't feel like it was that indicative of what you'd actually do in a crisis.*

*Ok yeah. And what about a class in another college, or an elective class?*

*Yeah so I mentioned it before and I never took a class in it before but something to teach your computer stuff, HTML that stuff.*

*Like a coding class?*

*Yeah!*

*Ok your answers were so helpful and that actually concludes my interview.*

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: M-Social/Digital Media- 3/17/2015*

So just to give you a little run down. I'll start by collecting some general information, then ask about your Penn State education and early career, then ask you to answer some mentoring scenarios.

*Ok sounds good.*

And I just want to remind you that all of your responses will be confidential and you are welcome to skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

*Ok cool thanks.*

So your graduation year, major and minor.

*I graduated in May 2014 and I majored in the public relations and advertising and I did no minor.*

And what was your first job, title and company, after graduation?

*I'm not sure how you want to word this, but I started as an intern at a public relations and social media platform called the Academy of Vocal Arts but I was just hired full-time to be the communications development manager.*

Ok great so we will talk about social media a little bit later. First can you tell me about your decision to major in PR at Penn State?

*Sure! I originally went in broadcast journalism and after taking a few classes in that I realized I wanted to be behind the camera gathering the information, spotting the story, things like that. I didn't love journalism so I took the intro to PR class. I learned everything you can do with PR and I realized that's what I wanted to do. I just really enjoy working with media and being able to create and promote something. I think there's something really exciting about it. I guess the satisfaction I see when I help clients and I realize, as cheesy as it sounds, that my work makes their dreams come true.*

That's good that you're passionate about your job then. So how did you decide to pursue a job in social and digital media specifically?

*Ok so I also should probably explain that I'm doing the work at the Academy of Vocal Arts is my real job but I also do social media consulting part-time.*

Awesome. So you work for yourself for that?

*Yeah you can say I freelance with social media consulting.*

So what made you want to do the social media consulting?

*I truly enjoy social media. I really like what you can do with it. I took the social media and PR class which was phenomenal. I like how you can engage with the people who love your brand. I think that's the coolest thing about it. You can see what they love about it and what they don't love about it. There are amazing things you can do, whether making a viral video or viral hashtag, it's exciting and there's so much exposure that can come with it.*

Awesome. Can you tell me about a time your Penn State education prepared you for work?

*Ok so I was taking COMM 471 and we had a class on using the software Cision. I thought that was super helpful because I could put that on my resume. And it may not have given me a huge edge over the competition, but it was a great skill to have. That was just one instance when I learned how to use software in class.*

Nice. So the flip side of this conversation is can you describe a time you felt unprepared for a public relations assignment?

*Yeah, can I go more into this social aspect of that?*

Of course.

*Ok so I feel like I didn't have that much experience with Hootsuite or TweetDeck, Twitter software like that. And I feel like so many PR jobs now expect you to know that. Pretty much everything to measure your social media impact so I wish I had more knowledge about that. Even if it wasn't in a social media class, but in another public relations class, I just think that's something we should all know pretty well.*

Totally. So can you identify a skill you think digital and social media work values more than another communications field? What's a skill specific to digital and social media that will help you excel?

*Creativity is one thing. Especially if you're applying for a social job, like the job that I had where you're creating the social media content. They tend to always ask, "what's your idea? What can do with this brand?" So you have to be creative and think outside the box, whether if it's for a job interview or just a meeting and they come to ask you and you're not prepared.*

So creativity and thinking on the spot?

*Exactly. Creative spontaneity is a good word.*

Awesome. And this last section is just on curriculum design. If you were mentoring an undergraduate student pursuing a job in digital and social media, what would you suggest to major and minor in?

*So major in public relations. I would minor in business that perspective can really benefit you.*

And what about elective classes you would suggest taking for that same student?

*Honestly to take as many creative classes as they possibly can. Whether it's an acting class, dance class, art class. I think that we work so much with numbers and writing... obviously writing creative outlet but we are confined by that in certain restraints. So you need to be able to let your creative juices flow by a more creative class.*

I love that idea. So if you were mentoring an undergraduate student pursuing a job in social and digital media, what skill would you emphasize as the most important in fostering in their academic career?

*Writing. Every person that wants a social job should have a blog. I feel like they should start a blog when they are starting to apply for jobs, if they haven't already. When they're creating their portfolio, whether press releases or social media content ideas, things like that, they need solid writing. So they can exercise those skills by blogging.*

Great. Then if you were designing a concentration in digital/social media, what types of classes would you make mandatory? You can make these classes up.

*I think maybe a crisis social media class would be really cool. I think a content class too, making your content really whole and specifying it to branding...even if you had to make your own brand and make that content specific to that class. Those would be two important classes to have.*

Ok and my last question, if you were given the opportunity to enroll in one additional public relations class and one additional elective class, what would you take and why? And this would be today, going back and taking two classes.

*I think I would take the public relations and social media class again.*

Kind of a more intensive version to build on what you learn?

*Yeah.*

And is there anything else you want to know?

*I'm trying to think. Maybe one of those kooky-crazy classes like Star-Trek. You know how they had that Joe Pattern class? Something like that.*

Ok so a fun, niche class?

*Exactly.*

Ok so that concludes my interview! Thank you for all of your responses.

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: J-Social/Digital Media-3/18/2015*

Just to give you an idea of what we're going to talk about, I'm going to start with some general information, then ask about your early career and education, and then ask how you would mentor a student pursuing a similar career path to yours. I also want to remind you that your responses to these questions will be confidential and you are welcome to skip any question you prefer not to answer.

*Perfect.*

Ok so what's your graduation year, major and minor?

*I graduated in 2012 and I double majored in public relations and psychology.*

Great and what was your first job after graduation, the title and company?

*So right after graduation I actually did a post-graduate internship at a small agency called Lane Public Relations, which actually turned into a full-time job after two months.*

Ok and is that where you're currently working now?

*No. So I stayed there for two years and then recently, about six months ago, I started working at Krupp Kommunikatons and that's where I am now.*

Ok great. And I know you said that you're really flexible about what specialty you talk about, so later in the interview is it ok if we talk about consumer marketing?

*Sure. Just to warn you, I'm more experienced with social media than consumer marketing.*

Well let's do that then. I just had another participant for consumer marketing so we can do social/digital.

*Ok perfect, great.*

Ok so now we're going to talk about your education. Can you tell me about your decision to major in PR at Penn State?

*Sure. When I got to Penn State I knew that I really liked writing. So I started off as a journalism major. I loved magazines and I really thought that I would work in the magazine industry at first. That kind of grew a little boring to me, it seemed like the same thing every day. So I looked into public relations because it's still in the College of Communications. And I really liked that because it still required writing, which I loved, but it encompassed a little more than that. There's event planning, social media, campaigns, stuff like that. So that's how I fell into it.*

Ok great. How did to pursue social media work?

*So social media is something we are all familiar with now. It's very important for consumers in general but also to clients and brands that are trying to attract consumers and speak to them. Although I started more traditionally on the PR path, a lot of what I did at my first job was social media content. That job I was mostly in charge of writing social media posts for Twitter, Facebook, helping the client I was working with find ways to engage with their customers or potential customers. Building a voice to the brand rather than being disheveled.*

Ok so it was kind of that personal interest then your work expanded on that?

*Yeah exactly. When I started at my job I told them I was well versed in social media and it was definitely something I was interested in helping with. We have a digital division, so whenever they needed help with social media work I helped whenever needed.*

Ok sounds good! So tell me about a time you felt your education prepared you at work.  
*I think one of the biggest things I remember from my time at Penn State, I think it was XXX's class, who said "make sure you read the news every single day. Stay on top of trends." Stuff like that. I have to say that was one of the things that resonated with me ever since I took that class since it's so true. If you're not reading every day, two newspapers or reading about the industry or your clients, something might be completely breaking news or whatever and if you miss out on that and your client sees it- you're screwed.*

So keeping up with the news. What about a specific skill? A skill that transferred from learning it in the classroom to using it at work...

*Definitely writing. For PR you have to be willing to write or you're going to hate your job. So I think most of the cases I took at Penn State, which feels so long ago even though it was two years ago, we did a lot of writing. And it was different styles of writing. You have to take that journalism class to learn how a journalist writes. Then you take the PR writing class to learn about press releases and campaigns. I think that definitely helped.*

That's nice to hear you thought that was valuable. So the flipside of this question is can you think of a time you felt unprepared when assigned a public relations assignment?

*At Penn State?*

No working. You were given a task and you didn't know how to do it.

*This isn't something you would learn at Penn State but maybe an internship, but one of the biggest things you learn in an entry level PR is how to build a media list and what media to reach out to for certain topics. And that's not something I remember learning at Penn State. I think initially that was little difficult for me. Just because you learn in your career you never want to be pitching to the Editor-in-Chief but that was nothing taught to me. Those aren't the type of people you pitch to.*

So learning how to make media lists and how to pitch?

*Yeah.*

Ok great. So this last question in this section is, can you describe a skill you think social/digital media values more than another communications field? So what's another skill that would help someone excel in social media?

*Let's see. Honestly it goes hand-in-hand in what I said before but you have to follow trends. You have to know what people are talking about regarding those trends and how to keep up with the conversation. So it's all about staying in tune and relating your brand to the world, when possible.*

Ok great. And this last section is on curriculum design. So if you were mentoring an undergraduate student pursuing a job in social and digital media, what would you suggest to major and minor in?

*I would say... So this is atypical because I don't know if I would say marketing or PR because you could go either way. But I think that I would more so go with public relations as your major*

*and minor in marketing. Just because public relations you're learning to follow the trend in the world, learning how to write, and learning how to use your writing and use trends to engage with consumers in a strategic way. Whereas marketing would be great to understand a brand specifically and learn what your audience is and your target consumer, PR balances it out.*

Ok! If you were designing public relations concentration in social and digital media, what types of classes would you make mandatory?

*Definitely content creation. I think it's really important to understand how to make content and how to do it for a brand. And with that, it would also be really great to have a class, I don't know what I would call it, but maybe applied social media. Something where you are given a couple of clients or mock clients that you have to build a social media campaign around. Or actually interacting with consumers. If you could get that experience doing that, it would be helpful.*

Definitely. What about some elective classes? Even if they were in different colleges.

*I would go with social psychology, especially since I doubled in it. You do learn how people think and how people react to different situations. I think that would be valuable for social media because then you can already know how people will react to something. And you always have to be careful with social media and so knowing that psychology could be really helpful.*

Yeah that's a good point. And this last question is, if you were going to enroll in one additional PR class and one additional elective class today, what course would you take and why? And you can make the classes up.

*Ok. I think for PR, maybe this class exists now but it didn't while I was there, but having a class that's really more of an applied PR concept would be beneficial. And what I mean by that is, I know there's a campaigns class, but having a real life client or something along those lines... I think there's a Happy Valley Communications. Something like that, if they could make that a class. You can have a strategy and make a campaign, an all-encompassing experience. That would have been helpful.*

And what about another class?

*I really wish I took a marketing class or some sort of business class. Mostly because I think it's really important to understand how business works when you have clients. You'll learn very quickly that they're very passionate about their brand and they know more about it than you, of course. And you do work with a lot of marketing people, you work with CEOs, so it's important to understand that basis.*

Totally. Ok so that actually concludes my interview, thank you so much for participating!

Moderator: Jacqueline Till

*Participant: D-Social/Digital Media- 3/19/2015*

So I'm going to give you a roadmap of what we're going to talk about. First I'll collect some general information. Then I'll ask you about your experiences, starting with your education through your current work. Finally I'll give you some mentoring scenarios of how you would advise a student following a similar career path to yours.

*Ok, cool!*

Great. And I just want to remind you that all of your responses are confidential and you are welcome to skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

*Ok.*

So what's your graduation year, major and minor?

*I graduated in 2014. I majored in PR with a minor in sociology.*

Ok and what was your first job after graduation, the title and company?

*Ok so I am currently working at MEC global and I am a social media associate. So I do social media planning.*

Ok so that was your first job after graduation and you're still there now?

*Yep!*

Great. So today I'm going to interview you about social media and digital media, to get insight for students who would want to pursue a career in that work. Is that ok?

*Definitely.*

Ok so back to your education. Can you tell me about your decision to major in public relations at Penn State?

*Sure yeah so when I was in high school I really wanted to get into broadcast journalism, so that's why I ultimately chose Penn State. And then, after freshman year, I realized I wanted to switch majors but stay in communications. So I explored the PR/advertising major. I'm in advertising now, but it's similar to PR in that you'll learn there are a lot of options you can do with a PR major.*

Ok! So my next question is when and why did you decide to pursue social media specifically?

*Well, I think you were actually in my class...*

Yeah the social media and public relations class!

*Yeah so well I actually love social media in general. I had an internship my sophomore year primarily working with social media. Then, the next summer, I also had an internship doing social media working for a small firm helping manage social media and the business. I thought it was really cool so I took the social media and PR class and I decided this is what I want to do after college. You don't really know what your exact job will be afterwards, but it gave me an idea... (Phone breaks up.)*

Sorry I think I got most of that but my phone isn't picking up your voice very clear. Let me move into another room.

*Yeah I think I am fine on my side.*

Ok! So can you describe a time you felt that your Penn State education prepared you at work?  
*Yeah ok. So I think that Penn State's does a good job preparing you for the real world. I think that the class structure, you know, especially with communications and get into your junior and senior year, you do a lot of group projects. You learn in lectures then you work in teams to do things on your own. It teaches... (Phone breaks up.)*

Sorry my phone is acting weird again. What was that last part? (Call drops.) Hey sorry we got disconnected.

*I should be ok on my side.*

Yeah I'm in my apartment. I'm wondering if it's the speaker mode was acting up but I'll go close to the recording device. You were saying it prepares you feel the real world?

*Yeah I was just giving an example that in class, especially junior and senior year, we didn't have written tests. We would have a group for the whole semester and work with that group for an ongoing project and that's how work is. You're not taking tests. You're not submitting tests hoping your grade will go up. You're working with a group that you don't get to choose. And you may get along with people, you may not, but you have to work together for a common goal. So I think Penn State prepared us for that. It's a big school and you're working with a lot of different personalities. That's how it is when you go off and work in the real world. You could get along with people, you could not, but you have to get your ideas together and make your client happy, or whomever you're working for happy. So you come up with an end result that's good. I think that the Penn State education really values that since all of teachers want us to do well. They were always there to make sure that we did.*

Yeah I agree there's a very collaborative environment. What about a specific skill you learned in a PR class? Did any of those directly relate to your work?

*My PR classes? My favorite PR class was with XXX and I can't remember the name but it's the basic one when you have to make a media kit at the end. And I'm not doing PR now, I'm doing advertising, so the work is different. But the gathering of the pieces was a skill that required time management. I would say that at Penn State, everyone encourages you not only to be a good student but also to get involved on campus and everything. I think that definitely helped me because now as a I'm working, I'm managing different projects but I can manage my time well.*

Good point. So the flipside of this question is, can you describe a time you felt unprepared for a specific work assignment? Like you were given a task that was never addressed in class or anything?

*Yeah the basic thing about school is they're teaching you very broad lessons. You can teach as much as you want but you can't really learn until you're thrown into the situation. When I got it my job I didn't really know what media buying was exactly. Of course you learn about it in textbooks, but I'm a very visual person and hands-on. So if I'm just reading off of a PowerPoint I'm not going to learn anything. But it's not the school's fault. I think maybe Penn State could have some options that maybe, kind of like an idea, to go into an agency and follow similar to bring your daughter to work day. Because coming to an agency was so different than what I thought it was. It was scary, I didn't know what to expect. Something like that would be cool, if there was an option or an opportunity to shadow someone.*

Yeah that's a good idea. So the last question in this category is what's a skill social/digital media values more than other communications fields? Like what's a skill a social media professional should have to excel in their career?

*Ok so I'm on the paid side of social media. I do the promotion, the money behind it. So anytime you're using social media, it's very important to think before you do. When someone sees this post or this blog, what will they think of my brand when they see this? You want to take that into consideration and be careful before putting anything down on paper or on the Internet. You want to take into consideration what your brand is like. Not matter what you want to do, if you want to promote or advertise your brand, always focus on how you want the consumer to see it. How you want them to think. Sorry that wasn't very, very focused.*

So being results-oriented it sounds like?

*Yeah results-oriented and reputation-oriented. To think about what you put online and how it reflects on your brand. Then how you want people to value your company. Always be true to your company. Don't try to make people happy, like don't sugarcoat it, be true to your brand or company.*

Ok! So this last section is on curriculum design. If you were mentoring an undergraduate student pursuing a career in social media, what would you suggest to major and minor in?

*I would say advertising, for the major and minoring in business. Because I think it's important, or true in social that advertising is the closest thing that you'd gain a lot of knowledge from. And I always kind of regret not minoring in business because I think you can take away a lot of good lessons and the math side.*

And what kind of electives would you encourage?

*Definitely the social media one.*

And you can make these classes up.

*Ok good! I was thinking an Introduction to Paid Media. Digital and social change so much, they're constantly changing. So it would be cool to have a class on the history of digital advertising and incorporate search in social, all of that. Maybe a class on traditional advertising. I also think it would also be important to take a class that teaches you how to deal with clients. You ultimately have to make them happy. So I think a class that focuses on problem solving with people would be good.*

Yeah! And if you were mentoring the same undergraduate student pursuing social/digital media jobs, what skill would you describe as the most important in fostering during their academic career?

*I would say learning how to work with people. Learning how to balance your personality with other people's personalities. I remember when I was in school I had a group project and everyone had a different personality- you may be very opinionated or you may be very quiet. It's important to be considerate. That's a very important skill. Being able to listen to people and consider their ideas.*

Yeah, totally. And then, this last question, if you were given the opportunity to enroll in one additional PR class and one additional elective class or class from another college today, what would you like to take and why? You can make these up too.

*Do they have to be PR?*

Well maybe one PR or communications one and one other, ideally.

*Maybe a class that's photography, that's not in the classroom, kind of like journalism class.*

Oh so like a photojournalism class?

*Yeah! Photojournalism. That's what I would take. It's important to know what's going around in the world and around you, especially in a PR or ad career. That's something I find at work. If I don't know what's going on in the world, I feel out of it. People will talk about the news and so a photojournalism class would be cool. Then maybe, let me think. Something hands-on with digital. A fake course that's, I feel like this class exists too, but pulling together a media plan. I never took it though, because I didn't major in advertising, but a campaigns class.*

Oh the one that's equivalent to our PR capstone class?

*Yeah because I took that for PR.*

Ok great! Your responses will be so helpful! And that actually concludes my interview.

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### **EDUCATION**

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA  
Schreyer Honors College  
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### **HONORS, AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS**

President's Freshman Award, 2012  
Dean's List, 2011-2014  
The Daily Collegian Manager's Scholarship, 2012-2013  
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### **ACTIVITIES AND ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP**

The Daily Collegian, Promotions Manager  
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### **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES**

Surgo Group Digital Marketing Agency, Digital Content and Media Intern  
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