

The Return of Public Relations to the Public Administration Curriculum?

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ABSTRACT

There are increasing indications that public relations is slowly returning to the public administration curriculum. This was a common topic in early public administration literature, but by the second half of the 20th century it had largely disappeared from widely used textbooks. Now, with the increased power of the news media and other rapidly growing and changing alternative communications venues that define this information age, public relations is again relevant for future public managers. This article summarizes research results about these trends, based on a survey of the literature. It presents the historical and contemporary normative case for including public relations in the MPA curriculum, and synthesizes these results to provide suggestions for pedagogic approaches.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a media-drenched era. The news media (and subsequent offshoots such as the blogosphere) dominate the metaphorical town square and drown out other voices and venues for public discussion. Once the news media has framed an issue (i.e., given it a spin that the press pack accepts as conventional wisdom), it is very hard to change any public debate. If the media portrays something as a crisis, then it is. And any public servant who openly disagrees with the latest media narrative gets pigeonholed as a rigid bureaucrat who is out of touch with reality. Conversely, if the media decides a topic is unimportant, then it can be very hard for a government manager to get that issue on an agenda of public attention (Kalantari, 2001).

This article contends that, based on research results, public relations appears to be returning to the curriculum of public administration. The context for this shift is the greatly increasing role, power, and influence of the news media, plus alternate mass communication methods, on 21st-century democratic governance. Therefore, due to a variety of causes that include new technologies and societal changes, the next generation of public servants will need training, not only in the traditional short list of management skills and

democratic theory, but also in media relations, public relations, and other forms of external communications.

The underlying premise of public administration is that management in the public sphere is qualitatively different from a similar role in the private sector, because of the inherent differences between the two sectors. One of the characteristics that differentiates the public and private sectors is the role and power of the news media and, more generally, the importance of external communication as an element of management. For business managers, cooperating with the news media and engaging in external communications is a *choice*. For public administrators it is a *requirement*. Freedom of the press and freedom of information laws compel civil servants to be accountable to the news media and the public-at-large. Unlike their business and nonprofit cousins, they *must* be transparent (Fairbanks, Plowman, & Rawlins, 2007; Liu & Horsley, 2007, pp.378-381; Roberts, 2006; Graber, 2003, pp.6-13).

STRAWS IN THE WIND: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS INDICATE INCREASED ATTENTION TO PUBLIC RELATIONS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The rise and fall of public relations in public administration textbooks was documented by Lee (1998). By 1992, Waldo (1992) observed that interest in external (as well as internal) communications in public administration was “a significant but neglected topic” (p.xi). However, a decade after Lee’s state-of-the-field review, this inquiry indicates that external communications is beginning to reappear in public affairs pedagogy. There are three indicators of this apparent trend in academic literature: (a) recent publications in *JPAE*, (b) other recent research-based literature, and (c) availability of new pedagogic materials.

One indicator for reconsidering the importance of public relations in public administration education is that several *JPAE* contributions have included the topic of public relations when discussing public administration pedagogy, even if it lacks that nomenclature. According to Peters (2009, p.15), when presented with potential curricular changes, MPA students in a capstone course wanted public relations training the most. Raphael and Nesbary (2005) focused on strategic communications, a broader topic that includes external communications within its rubric. Kirilin (2005) viewed communication as one of three civic skills that public managers needed. Klingner and Washington (2000) identified “the need to find ways to influence public policy decisions” (p.41) as part of a global approach to public administration training. Aristigueta (1997) emphasized the importance of interpersonal communication skills, which encompasses, of course, external communications. Other pedagogic topics discussed in *JPAE* that overlap with external communications include Kim and Layne’s (2001) discussion of e-government, Dawes (2004) regarding information technology, Reddy (2000) on crisis management, and Fontaine (1998) suggesting the value of a mass-media-related course project as an effective hands-on instructional tool.

A second indicator of renewed attention to the subject of public relations is an increase in research published as academic literature. However, much of it emanates from communications- and public-relations-based academic researchers, rather than those specifically in public administration or its related disciplines. Liu and Horsley (2007) are in the midst of a longer-term project to develop a theoretical and operational model of the external communications of government, and already have published the theoretical model they are examining and testing. Diana Knott Martinelli (formerly Diana Knott), with David Martinelli (D. Knott & D. Martinelli, 2005; D.K. Martinelli, 2006) researched public information activities of government agencies, especially in the area of transportation. Fairbanks, Plowman, and Rawlins (2007) developed a model for transparency in government communication, and Motschall and Cao (2002) analyzed the public information role of police departments. Focusing on public relations in the subfield of public health, Wise (2002-03, 2001) has examined links between public relations and organizational effectiveness, and proposed a larger research agenda for examining public relations in public health.

Several European-based academic sources, also in communications departments, have been interested in external government communications during the first decade of the 21st century. Øyvind Ihlen at the University of Oslo (Norway), a member of the Editorial Review Committee of *Public Relations Review*, has been an adviser to the national government on public relations policies, and recently has assisted in developing a new policy on governmental external communications (Ø. Ihlen, personal communications, November 14, 2007 – December 13, 2007). Dave Gelders (2005, 2006) at the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) and several of his colleagues (Gelders, Bouckaert, & van Ruler, 2007) have published extensively on government communications, especially about conveying governmental intentions during the public policy development process. Also, two Israeli faculty members issued a guidebook for cities and countries on crisis management media strategies (Avraham & Ketter, 2008).

However, there also has been a recent increase in published scholarship regarding government public relations by faculty in public administration and related fields, although it is more modest than that from communications faculty. A study of senior public administrators at the state government level noted that “About half the administrators’ time is devoted to internal matters; about half is spent on external relations” (Bowling & Wright, 1998, p.435). Kaufman’s career-summarizing overview of the role of public administration in modern society included observations about the importance of the news media to modern public administration:

Many of them [modern day reporters] assume they have a special responsibility for illuminating everything in government and politics,

and that everything in these fields is therefore fair game. ... What they publish can profoundly affect the fortunes of those they write about. Everybody is aware of their power, administrative agencies no less than the others. Agencies therefore work hard to keep on good terms with the members of the fourth estate (Kaufman, 2001, p.29).

Swoboda (1995) published the results of his research on media coverage of local government budgeting. LaPorte and Metlay (1996, p.344) discussed the importance of external relations in a government agency's effort at accomplishing trustworthiness. Several chapters in the Garnett and Kouzmin (1997) handbook on the larger topic of administrative communication specifically discussed public relations. While not based in academia, Library of Congress researcher Kevin Kosar (2005) has tracked Congressional efforts to control the external communications activities of Federal agencies. Weiss (2002), who started her academic career in business administration, also wrote about public information as a tool of modern governance.

Several academic researchers from public administration have published work on subjects closely related to external communications, such as freedom of information and government transparency. Probably the most prominent is Roberts (2006), who won several awards for his book, *Blacked Out: Government Secrecy in the Information Age*, which offers an international perspective. He also published articles on media coverage of government, the relationship between New Public Management and information, and the increasing limitations on access to information (Roberts, 1997, 2000, 2005). Focusing more specifically on the U.S., Piotrowski (2007; Piotrowski & Van Ryzin, 2005; Piotrowski & Rosenbloom, 2002) researched the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and transparency in American governments. Finally, Holden (1996) observed that "The potential interconnection between public opinion and the success of public administration is one of the most profound realities to which political science may yet direct new attention" (p.35). The non-refereed monthly publication *PA Times*, put out by the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), featured two articles in mid-2008 on government public relations (Cohen, 2008; Survey on Government Communicators, 2008). Given ASPA's membership base of both academics and practitioners, these recent articles are another indicator of the reemergence of this subject on the public administration agenda.

The third sign that public relations apparently is returning to the public administration curriculum is found in pedagogic literature. Waugh and Manns (1991; Manns & Waugh, 1989) made the case in the late 1980s and early 1990s for the importance of including communications (both external and internal) in MPA curricula. Similarly, Garnett (1992, p.xv; 1997, pp.764-765) argued twice in the 1990s to incorporate communications into the MPA curriculum.

Shifting from a general, pedagogic focus on communication to the narrower topic of external communications, one of the 1998 joint committee recommendations by NASPAA and the American Political Science Association (APSA) Section on Public Administration was that “Those involved in shaping public administration curricula should work to ensure that managers more fully understand how to get their message out to the media” (Thompson, 1998, p.4).

Alongside pedagogic literature, there also has been an increase in the availability of pedagogic materials that relate to using public relations in public administration. Most of them come from practitioners or “pracademics.” Overviews with a “how-to” bent offer some relatively recent examples, such as publications by the Federal Communicators Network (2001), the International City/County Management Association (2003), and the California Association of Public Information Officers (Krey, 2000). The International City/County Management Association (2002) recently issued a publication that focuses more narrowly on crisis communications. While not specifically targeted to government, Brown’s (2002) “how-to” on public appearances is an example of current applied literature that also is relevant to public administrators in training. Finally, two recent textbooks on (or including) government public relations were issued by commercial publishers, which is a significant market-based signal of increased interest in the subject (Fitch, 2004; Lee, 2008a).

REALITY CHECK: EXAMPLES OF RECENT INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS

Pedagogy in government public relations needs to be grounded in the “real world” of practice. Therefore, in contrast to the preceding academically based review, this section briefly highlights a few tangible examples of innovative practices that demonstrate how public relations can contribute to the “doing” side of public administration.

Generally, there are two categories of government public relations (PR): pragmatic and democratic. The first one — pragmatic — enlists the practical uses of external communications to help accomplish the substantive mission of an agency. A columnist in the *New York Times* concisely stated the premise of this orientation: “No matter how lofty the aims of a government program, it usually won’t make a difference if people can’t understand it” (Leonhardt, 2007, p.C9). Some examples of pragmatically using PR to help promote the core mission of an agency include the following:

- While not required, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (2008) mailed to all taxpayers an informational sheet about economic stimulus payments being issued in mid-2008. This helped taxpayers understand the program, the amount of the check they would receive, and when they would receive it.
- Rather than relying solely on post-hoc, criminal-justice-type

enforcement, the Virginia Department of Health used a preventative strategy to promote a law prohibiting sex with minors. It used billboards, coasters, cocktail napkins and postcard-sized messages as part of a widespread public information campaign to remind potential offenders about the law and its consequences (Jenkins, 2004).

- The National Highway Safety Administration spent \$7.5 million on an advertising campaign targeted at teenagers, with the goal of convincing them not only to wear seat belts, but also to learn the benefits of *using* seat belts (Thomas, 2008).
- To implement the new Medicare drug-benefit program, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2005) ran paid advertisements in the nation's major newspapers to alert seniors about an upcoming TV program that explained the new benefit plan.
- The legal responsibility of the U.S. Labor Department's Employee Benefits Security Administration is that it "protects the integrity of pensions, health plans, and other employee benefits for more than 150 million people." Hence, it did not deal directly with citizens, only with plan managers and corporations. Yet, in the spirit of that legal mission, it posted an online retirement planning calculator that any citizen could use. The device won critical acclaim from the *Wall Street Journal*, which judged it as "one of the best" of all the tools available to people as they plan for retirement (Ruffenach, 2008, p.2).

The second category of government PR activities relates to public administration's general role of promoting democracy. Some examples of using external communications to further the democratic role of public administration include the following:

- In 2007, a professional association of Canadian accountants released results of a best practices survey of democratic reporting throughout the Canadian public sector — especially public reporting incorporating performance results data (Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation, 2007).
- In 2008, the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (2008) and the Treasury Department, as a way to inform the public on the long-term consequences of current budget trends, issued an eight-page summary of fiscal trends in the Federal government.
- While rebuilding a bridge that collapsed in Minnesota, the state's Department of Transportation realized that the work site would be of high interest to citizens. Therefore, it arranged with the construction contractor to conduct "Sidewalk Superintendent" tours every Saturday during the rebuilding process. This way, citizens could become better informed about seeing their tax dollars at work (Davey, 2008).

These examples demonstrate the vitality of the practice of government public

relations and its centrality to both the pragmatic and democratic missions of public administration. They are intended as concrete indicators regarding the utility of public relations in the PA curriculum.

THE NORMATIVE CASE FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS IN TRADITIONAL MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION LITERATURE

In preceding sections, this inquiry has identified contemporary writings and examples indicating the apparent re-recognition of the value that public relations brings to public administration. However, given that PR used to be viewed as an important topic (Lee, 1998), it may be helpful to summarize earlier normative literature, even though it gradually faded from widespread contemporary attention. Barnard (1938/1982), one of the earliest management theorists, argued that if “one examines all the acts of any person for even one day it will be at once evident in nearly all cases that many of these acts are outside *any* system of coöperation [sic] ... In addition it appears necessary to regard as a part of an organization certain efforts of many persons not commonly considered ‘members’” (pp.70-71, emphasis original).

In a recent edition of a seminal study of decision-making in all large organizations, Simon (1997) noted:

Observation indicates that, as the higher levels are approached in administrative organizations, the administrator’s “internal” task (his relations with the organization subordinate to him) decreases in importance relative to his “external” task (his relations with persons outside the organization). An ever larger part of his work may be subsumed under the heads of “public relations” and “promotion.” The habits of mind characteristic of the administrative roles at the lower and higher levels of an organization undoubtedly show differences corresponding to these differences in function (p.294).

Addressing the same question from the public relations perspective, Grunig (1992) estimated that corporate CEOs spend 25 to 75 percent of their time on external relations (p.236). According to two other public relations researchers, “Some executives say they now spend as much as 50 percent of their time attending to issues management, either in the form of government relations, dealing with regulatory matters, or social responsibility programs” (Gaunt & Ollenburger, 1995, p.202). Shifting specifically to public administration literature, the normative value of public relations often was noted in mid-20th-century writings. In 1941, Mosher emphasized that “In a democracy the importance of public relations can hardly be overstressed. ... On the whole, public authorities have signally failed to keep their ‘masters,’ the public, acquainted with their enterprises and the problems for which they are responsible” (1941, pp.3-4). In outlining the responsibilities of a senior administrator, Stone (1945) argued that

“external affairs” was one of the key roles of an agency head. For him, the measure of an executive’s success was providing the agency with “a favorable climate within which to function,” which was accomplished largely through “*outside* responsibilities” (p.58, emphasis added). Gulick (1948) concluded that one of the 15 lessons learned from World War II was that “The support of public opinion is essential for good administration,” and therefore successful government management must include “a continuous process of taking the public into one’s confidence” (pp. 110-111). In 1949, Fesler (2008/1949) theorized that Federal regional directors had three important roles, one of which was “to be the principal contact man [sic] or public relations man [sic]” (p.82) for the region.

During that time, the discipline launched a major effort to use case studies as a focal point for public administration pedagogy. In the 1950s, one of the widely used casebooks was issued by the Inter-University Case Program (ICP) and edited by its staff director, Harold Stein. He divided the broad subject of public administration into seven topics, one of which he titled “Relations with the Public” (Stein, 1952, pp.739-853). That section contained four cases (of 26 in the book) and the cross-index listed several others that were relevant to the subject (p.860). A year later, ICP published another case on public relations, titled “The Regional Information Officer” (Kriesberg, 1953).

Also in the 1950s, Lawton (1954) concluded that “As a public figure, the administrator is inevitably up to his ears in public relations” (p.118). Later in the decade, Redford (1975/1958) argued that, for a government agency to implement a program, citizen “support is a vital necessity for program effectiveness. Agencies must be allowed facilities for obtaining it if they are to accomplish anything for the public” (p.88). In a different piece, he broadened his generalization to encompass a wider array of public information activities, with a multiplicity of purposes: “In a democratic society each agency must bear a responsibility for informing people of the benefits and liabilities of its program and, except as required for national security or the privacy of its staff, for making its processes known to society” (Redford, 1969, p.139).

Throughout his career, Dimock made the normative case that public relations was important to senior public administrators. In 1934, in one of his first publications, he began an article (in a non-refereed journal) with this statement: “The most neglected aspect of public administration is salesmanship – what is usually called, in the broader sense, public relations” (Dimock, 1934, p.660). Thirty years later, he still was trying to persuade public administration of the value in following his PR advice:

1. Think of public relations simply as administrative policy, *not* as a separate activity.
2. Watch public relations more closely than you do *any* other function, personnel matters included (Dimock, 1965, p.48, emphasis added).

The same year as Dimock’s 1965 comments, a report to the British

government by the United Kingdom's Royal Institute of Public Administration echoed his normative argument about the importance of external communication at the highest levels of public administration. The report called for increasing the training in public relations for senior civil servants, even though they "do not come into contact in a very direct way with the ordinary citizen, but whose activities affect almost everything the ordinary citizen does" (Ogilvy-Webb, 1965, pp.181-182).

However, the literature also cautioned public administrators to be wary in their public relations practices, so as not to trigger legislative and executive hostility. Elected officials object to the term "propaganda" as opposed to "information" (the definition of which is in the eye of the beholder), and to overt attempts by a government agency to obtain and mobilize public support. Popularity with the citizenry can enhance an agency's autonomy, thereby reducing the leverage politicians can wield over it (Carpenter, 2001, pp.344-355; Lee, 1997; Rourke, 1984, p.50; 1961, pp.183-207; Simon, Smithburg, & Thompson, 1991/1950, pp.402-422). Given that public relations can benefit the institutional interests of an agency, it must be practiced with some caution.

NOMENCLATURE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

There is no commonly accepted nomenclature for this subject matter, with some of it having come and gone in popularity over the decades. Some commonly used terms include (in alphabetical order)

- Communication, Communications, Public Communication, Organizational Communication, Administrative Communication, External Communication;
- Information, Public Information;
- Public Affairs;
- Publicity; and
- Public Relations, External Relations.

Each of these terms has advantages and disadvantages. For example, "communication" (and its variations) often is a modern-day term for three other fields: journalism, speech therapy and rhetoric (as in the old-fashioned academic title of Speech Departments). "Information" has been largely appropriated by the subject of information technology (IT) or information studies (formerly librarianship). In the Federal government, "public affairs" is a polite synonym for public relations, with most Cabinet departments having an assistant secretary for public affairs (Lee, 2008a). However, the term can be confused with its usage in public administration, such as in the title of this publication, the *Journal of Public Affairs Education (JPAAE)*, and its sponsor, the National Association of Schools of *Public Affairs* and Administration (NASPAA). Also, "public affairs" is widely used in the private sector as a title for corporate lobbying and PR programs (Harris & Fleisher, 2005).

“Publicity” is usually viewed as an old-fashioned and too-narrow term, while “public relations” tends to be anathema to Congress — ever vigilant to stomp out self-serving propaganda from the bureaucracy. Similarly, in contemporary popular usage, the initials PR tend to convey an unsavory, barely truthful, and manipulative meaning. Therefore, if only by process of elimination, “external relations” or “external communications” become terms that have a relatively self-explanatory and neutral meaning. Nonetheless, this author’s preference is “public relations.” That approach is reflected in the nomenclature of most of the courses currently offered (see next section and Appendix A). When viewed literally, the term is very compatible with the term public administration. So, “public relations in public administration” does more than just focus on the maintenance of relations with audiences outside the bureaucracy. The duplicate use of the word “public” can be seen not as repetitive, but rather as highlighting the public-ness of public administration itself. If one argues that government management is a qualitatively different activity than business administration, then the focus on the public context of both public administration and public relations helps distinguish the government manager’s responsibilities from comparable counterparts in the business or nonprofit sectors (Lee, 2002). In this context, the communications and information activities of public relations in public administration would, by necessity, be different from the practice of public relations in the management of organizations in the other two sectors.

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON THE SCOPE OF THE SUBJECT AND SAMPLES OF OFFERINGS

Earlier literature often focused on techniques of public relations in government, but with little context regarding why a government manager might turn to public relations to accomplish agency missions. More recent literature focuses on the *purposes* or *objectives* of public relations in public administration. In the 1990s, Baker sought to define public relations in government according to the basic goals and functions of

- Political communication (i.e. to influence elected decision-makers),
- Information services,
- Developing and protecting positive institutional images, and
- Generating public feedback (Baker, 1995, pp.456-457).

At the turn of the millennium, a practitioner defined the field based on what a professional actually did, and focused on the *functions* or *responsibilities* of a public information officer, which include the following:

- Monitoring media coverage,
- Briefing and advising political officials,
- Managing media relations,
- Informing the public directly,
- Sharing information across the administration,

- Formulating communication strategies and campaigns, and
- Researching and assessing public opinion (Édes, 2000, pp.458-461).

Finally, this author suggested synthesizing the literature into a typology, based on the purposes of external relations in government management, such as

1. Media relations;
2. Public reporting;
3. Responsiveness to the public;
4. (Outreach:) Increasing the utilization of services and products;
5. (Outreach:) Public education and public service campaigns;
6. (Outreach:) Seeking voluntary public compliance with laws and regulations;
7. (Outreach:) Using the public as the eyes and ears of an agency; and
8. Increasing public support (Lee, 2008b, pp.7-11).

These items represent efforts to define the scope of the topic by enumerating what is included, but a different approach can be to focus on what is excluded. From this perspective, public relations comprises all of a government agency's external communications except for legislative relations, client and vendor relations, contract relations, detailed financial statements, marketing, and public participation in the process of adopting new agency policies. Research results based on Internet searches and other sources identified several U.S. institutions of higher education that recently have offered courses on public relations in public administration. At the time this research was conducted, the newest course based in a public administration program was a special topics seminar in 2008-09 on "Public Information and Communication," in the School of Public Affairs at Arizona State University. Other public administration program offerings included (a) a three-credit course on "Public Relations for Public Managers" in the Department of Public Administration at Florida International University (Miami), and (b) a course on "Public Relations," in the MPA program at Clark University (Worcester, MA).

Several other universities offered public relations courses, but they were based in communications programs rather than in public administration. The newest offering was a 2009 special topics seminar on "Public Information Strategies," in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Boston University's Department of Mass Communication, Advertising and Public Relations provided a course on "Government Public Affairs," and the Marketing Communication Department of Columbia College Chicago lists a course titled "Political & Government Public Relations." Appendix A provides Web links to some of the above-mentioned courses, as well as a few others, at American colleges and universities. Outside the U.S., public administration programs that recently offered courses on public relations included the School of Public Administration at Renmin University of China (course title: "Government Public Relations"), the Public

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Administration Department of Yarmouk University in Jordan (course title: “Public Relations in Public Administration”), and the Department of Administrative Management at Chinese Culture University in Taiwan (course title: “Government Public Relations”).

In an effort to synthesize the course examples, pedagogic literature and research results cited above, Appendix B presents a suggested course outline.

SUMMARY

The argument that public relations is an important part of the practice of government management originally had been made in leading textbooks and by public administration writers of the mid-20th century, but attention to the subject faded as the century progressed. However, in the past decade, the field of public administration appears to be rediscovering the importance of external communications. Some signals of this trend include references to the topic in *JPAE*, more published research in academic journals for public administration and communications, and an increasing amount of pedagogic materials such as publications and current course offerings. In part, these trends are reflections of the rise in importance and centrality of the news media and other communication methods vis-à-vis the public sector in the 21st century.

This article has sought to synthesize these shifting trends into a contemporary case for purposes of more widely re-establishing the attention given to public relations in public administration pedagogy. It has included suggestions about (a) nomenclature, (b) the scope of the subject, (c) examples of contemporary course descriptions from U.S. post-secondary public administration and communications programs, and (d) a sample syllabus for a three-credit graduate course.

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APPENDIX A

***Selected Courses on Government Public Relations
at U.S. Institutions of Higher Education***

(Items listed vertically in the following order: Course title and number; Dept. or School in College or University; Web info)

Public Information and Communication (PAF 591 – Special Topics Seminar)

School of Public Affairs, Arizona State University

Retrieved June 25, 2009, from

http://spa.asu.edu/pdffiles/syllabi/summer2008/Kaan_Syllabus_Sum08.pdf

Public Relations for Public Managers (PAF 4260)

Dept. of Public Administration, Florida International University

Retrieved June 24, 2009, from

<http://029d57c.netsolvps.com/catalogsample/index.php>

Public Relations (MPA 3090)

Master of Public Administration Program, Clark University

Retrieved June 23, 2009, from

http://copace.clarku.edu/courses/MPA_catalog.pdf (p. 17)

Governmental Public Affairs (COM CM 734)

Dept. of Mass Communication, Advertising and Public Relations; Boston University

Retrieved June 25, 2009, from

<http://www.bu.edu/bulletins/com/item15.html#anchor8>

Political & Government Public Relations (54-2705)

Marketing Communication Dept., Columbia College Chicago

Retrieved June 21, 2009, from

http://www2.colum.edu/course_descriptions/54-2705.html

APPENDIX B

Suggested Course Outline

In some public administration programs, courses meet once a week to cater to the needs of adult and working students. This course outline is based on that structure, with each numbered topic reflecting the subject for that once-a-week class session. However, the outline easily can be adapted for other course schedules. For courses that meet more than once a week, headings 2 through 14 describe the topic for all class sessions during that week of the semester.

Part I. Introduction

1. Prefatory session

Review of syllabus and writing projects, housekeeping.

2. The Rise of the Media

The centrality of communications and the news media in politics, government, and public administration in the 21st century.

3. Overview of Government External Relations

The pragmatic and democratic purposes of public relations. How can various external communications programs (whether pragmatic or democratic in purpose) help an administrator accomplish the mission of the agency?

4. Constitutional, Legal and Political Contexts

The public context of government management. Implications of freedom of the press, transparency, and freedom of information. Political oversight of the agency's operations. Politicians at times criticize agency public relations as self-serving propaganda rather than as helpful information.

Part II. Purposes of Government Public Relations

5. Media Relations

The duty of public administration to cooperate with the news media, given the media's Constitutional role as an instrument of democracy.

6. Public Reporting

The role of the public administrator in contributing to an informed public opinion, including accountability to the citizenry for the agency's work and performance.

7. Responsiveness to the Public

Seeing the work of the agency through the eyes of other stakeholders, in order to increase awareness of how to improve the agency's interactions with external constituencies.

8. Increasing the Utilization of Services and Products

Targeted communications programs can help potential clients know about the services that an agency offers, and if they qualify.

9. Public Education and Public Service Campaigns

Wholesale is cheaper than retail. Convincing the public-at-large on the desirability of certain behaviors (e.g., stay in school, prevent forest fires, etc.) can reduce the costs of one-on-one services.

10. Seeking Voluntary Public Compliance with Laws and Regulations

Ignorance of the law is no excuse, but a pragmatic public administrator understands that disseminating helpful information to appropriate audiences on laws and regulations can increase voluntary compliance and reduce regulatory and enforcement costs.

11. Using the Public as the Eyes and Ears of an Agency

Typified by 911 systems, citizens can co-produce agency services. This is not limited to emergency services. Other agencies can similarly benefit from mechanisms for the public to submit relevant information, such as by reporting pothole sites, or using an elder-abuse hotline.

Part III. Stepping Cautiously into the Political Minefield

12. Increasing Public Support

Good public relations can have the effect of increasing an agency's popularity. This, in turn, increases the agency's autonomy from political oversight. However, overt efforts to generate public support can trigger criticism from politicians (always welcome by the news media) that the agency is engaging in propaganda and wasting tax dollars.

13. Legislative Relations

This is a specialized form of external communications, given that the legislative branch controls the purse strings. Agencies must try their best to cater to legislators' interests and concerns, while taking care not to become susceptible to improper political meddling.

Part IV. Summary and Conclusions

14. Summary

How can a government agency benefit from public relations? What approaches can a public administrator adopt to engage in successful external relations? What approaches should be adopted? Why? What approaches should not be adopted? Why?

15. Semester review