

**Beyond Reading, Writing, and Research:  
Assessing (and Enhancing) the Political and Economic Competency of  
U.S. Public Relations Majors**

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In recent years, public relations pedagogy has received ample and much-deserved attention aimed at enhancing the professionalism of the field. *The Professional Bond – Public Relations Education and the Practice*, a 2006 report issued by the Commission on Public Relations Education (a group of scholars and practitioners), did much to solidify recommendations for public relations education without being overly prescriptive or U.S.-centric. As a result of this and related efforts to tie pedagogy to practice, public relations students are being educated in a more consistent manner and are discovering through conferences, internships, and entry-level positions that their burgeoning skills are transferable across geographic regions and, indeed, are in demand by corporate, non-profit, and government entities alike. One of the greatest thrills for an educator is to witness graduates experience both the nervous uncertainty of embarking on a “real” job and the subsequent realization that

they, in fact, really do have the capability and the confidence to navigate the ever-changing field of public relations.

To be perceived as a credible counselor to executives who are often comparatively advanced in age, experience, and rank, the advancing public relations professional must exhibit a sound grasp of an organization's operating environment, particularly the political, economic, and social/cultural forces that enable and restrict managers' abilities to fulfill organizational objectives (e.g., Culbertson & Jeffers, 1992; Culbertson, Jeffers, Stone, & Terrell, 1993; Lauzen, 1995; Sriramesh, 2009; Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003). To do so, practitioners do not necessarily require degrees in economics, political science, or sociology, but they do need to have working knowledge of some fundamental concepts from each area. The public relations curriculum, often housed in the liberal arts, readily allows for such instruction to be intertwined into existing coursework.

American radio and television hosts have found "man on the street" interviews that test the global and civic competency of college students (including those from Ivy League universities) to have high entertainment value, but for reasons that make most educators cringe. Repeatedly in these scenarios, so-called educated young minds are unable to name the vice president of the United States, list the three branches of the U.S. government, or identify capitalism as the nation's predominant economic model. Indeed, presidential and other candidates seeking national office (as well as beauty queens and pop stars) have been stumped by sly interviewers asking seemingly simple

questions about the names of heads of state or the continent associated with a particular nation. Embarrassing outcomes abound.

Public relations educators including Taylor (2001), Kruckeberg (1998), and Sharpe (1984) have brought attention to the need for internationalizing curricula, and Sriramesh and Verčič (2003; see also Sriramesh, 2009) explicated the tie between political/economic competency and global competency. The purpose of this article is to explain how a public relations program began and continues to conduct a methodology of assessing the political, economic, and closely related global competency of its majors in a way that can be easily replicated on other campuses. Ultimately, the aims of reporting this research and encouraging its duplication are to strengthen the global and civic competency-building capacity of public relations education (undergraduate and graduate) and enhance the professionalism of the practice. Following a succinct literature review providing rationale for global, political, and economic competency among public relations professionals, the research design is explained and select findings are reported. The article concludes with pedagogical recommendations to enhance essential competencies among U.S. public relations majors.

### **Background**

The public relations program analyzed resides in a university of nearly 17,000 students that is designated by the Carnegie Foundation (<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/>) as a “research university with high research activity” and listed in best U.S. college lists published by *Princeton Review*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and *Forbes* magazine. Each of the university’s undergraduate

programs that is eligible for professional accreditation is accredited. The university is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and the public relations program (as part of a mass communication department) is accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC).

In 2009, a perfect storm developed in that the university's general education committee was tasked with enhancing the global and civic competency of all students through the "gen-ed" curriculum. Concurrently, another university committee was preparing for SACS accreditation. In 2010, SACS officials pressured numerous university program coordinators to improve assessment of educational outcomes, particularly in regard to documentation of methods, tracking of results, and, most importantly, "closing the loop" by altering curricula and instruction to heed assessment findings. Public relations faculty members were engaged in each of these efforts. Thus, the timing of these university-wide initiatives, coupled with a forthcoming ACEJMC accreditation visit, was ideal to combine and implement these two efforts – assessing global and civic competency and educational outcomes – in the public relations program. Public relations outcomes were satisfactorily assessed in previous years, but not to the extent assessment procedures now employ.

### **Literature Review**

The call for internationalizing public relations curricula and enhancing students' global knowledge, cultural awareness, and appreciation for diversity has been longstanding and well supported from both a scholarly and a practitioner perspective.

*The Professional Bond* report (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2006) emphasized the increasingly global nature of public relations practice and called for a more concentrated focus on global perspectives and multicultural issues in undergraduate public relations education. In providing such, educators could help prepare future practitioners to work “in an increasingly connected world where mutual understanding and harmony are more important than ever” (p. 4). In its accrediting standard for curriculum and instruction, ACEJMC (n.d.) delineated professional values and competencies students are expected to possess in order to work “in a diverse global and domestic society” (Standard 2).

Suggestions on how to enhance the global nature and practical applicability of public relations education, along with examples on how this task has been accomplished in the U.S. and abroad, are fortunately plentiful and span decades of research (e.g., Creedon & Al-Khaja, 2005; Garcia, 2010; Kruckeberg, 1998; Sharpe, 1984). Taylor (2001) offered a detailed “how to” guide of tested pedagogical methods to incorporate cultural issues, international affairs, and current events in public relations instruction, stating that “one of the most frustrating parts of teaching international public relations is that students know very little about the world” (p. 79). She, like many educators, observed a lack of student interest in news reports.

From the practitioner perspective, DiStaso, Stacks, and Botan’s (2009) survey of public relations executives revealed not only employers’ desire for (and seldom success in finding) advanced-level practitioners with global perspective, but also a need for senior practitioners with issues management and environmental monitoring skills, both

of which require applied knowledge in the social and behavioral sciences. A predecessor study (Stacks, Botan, & Turk, 1999) had similar findings, demonstrating the consistency of employer needs over time.

In 2009, the Institute for Public Relations (“New Public Relations Research,” 2009; “2015’s Top Communicators,” n.d.) partnered with Bournemouth University to research and identify the knowledge and abilities senior professionals will need in five years, highlighting a demand for greater competency in cultural communications. Similar to DiStaso et al. (2009), the Institute recognized a dearth of senior-level advisors who can communicate across cultures with confidence.

The need for more globally competent professionals in public relations is clear. Sriramesh and Verčič (2003) expanded conventional thinking when they recognized that global competency had to include a working knowledge of not only culture, but also the closely related variables of political and economic systems. To that end, Sriramesh (2009) suggested that the definition of culture should explicitly include political and economic culture. Duhé and Sriramesh (2009) offered a template for operationalizing and investigating political economy variables in international public relations, stating in a subsequent work:

We argue that public relations is more effective, especially when working on a global scale, for clients, stakeholders, and the society at large when practitioners take into account not only the economic, but also the social and political factors that influence relationship building with publics. (Sriramesh & Duhé, 2009, p. 369)

In regard to what public relations scholars and practitioners can learn from other disciplines, Oviatt (n.d.) wrote:

We rarely take time to think about what economics, law, cultural studies, political science, sociology, social psychology, linguistics and even communications theory have to say to public relations. That robs us of opportunities to greatly (and quickly) expand our knowledge base and understand what's really going on when we seek to build public relationships and resolve issues. (para. 2)

The need for practitioner competency in economic and political matters is apparent upon examination of evolving themes and case study topics in the literature. Lawniczak (2009) highlighted the ties between public relations theory and political economy and emphasized the importance of economics to public relations practitioners. McKie and Lawniczak (2009) argued that an understanding of economic principles is particularly important in times of economic downturn. Research focusing on the role of public relations in transitional economies has been conducted by Kent, Taylor, and Turcilo (2006); Lawniczak (2007); and Molleda (2006), among others. Miller (2010) discussed marketplace advocacy and its aim to influence public policy in often controversial ways. Signitzer and Coombs (1992) saw the potential for theoretical convergence between public relations and public diplomacy, and other authors have followed this line of thinking (e.g., L'Etang, 1996; Yun, 2006). In each of these studies, fundamental principles of economics and political science are prevalent, providing further support for the need to develop in students at least a basic competency in these

disciplines and an applied understanding of how political economic matters affect, and are affected by, the public relations process.

### **Method**

To accommodate expectations set forth by SACS and ACEJMC, the assessment tool developed by the public relations program focuses on four areas: 1) level of competency in global issues; 2) appreciation for people of other cultures; 3) understanding of basic concepts shaping U.S. political and economic systems; and 4) working knowledge of major themes in public relations history, theory, practice, research, and ethics (with emphasis on the principles of free speech and press). Given the focus of this article, only findings regarding the first three areas are discussed herein. A findings report is in the Appendix, and those interested may contact the author to receive a copy of the instrument(s) used.

Hard copy pre- and post-tests are used for assessments (primarily to prohibit online searches for answers). That is, public relations majors are tested in global, political, and economic literacy on the first day of their first public relations course (i.e., Principles of Public Relations) and again, with a slightly revised<sup>1</sup> instrument, at the end of their senior capstone course (i.e., Public Relations Campaign Management) to assess the extent to which students' coursework, work experience, maturation, etc. contributed to their understanding of global, political, and economic issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Slight wording revisions to the pre-test in the principles course are needed to accommodate graduating seniors in the capstone course. These include assessing perceived benefits of studying a new language (vs. hopes of becoming fluent in a new language), whether the college experience made (vs. should make) him/her a more worldly person, whether he/she has (vs. hopes to have) a better understanding of global issues upon graduation, whether he/she actually studied abroad (vs. having an interest in doing so), and level of satisfaction with hands-on experience gained in college (vs. preference of learning through lecture or experience). Additionally, an open-ended question regarding suggestions for curriculum improvement is included in the capstone instrument.

Competency in the first area, global issues, is assessed by soliciting attitudes toward learning a new language, the extent to which students feel well informed about international events covered in the news, and the ability to identify major religious divisions within Islam and the name of the U.K. prime minister, among other items.<sup>2</sup> For the second area, appreciation of people of other cultures, students' interest in studying abroad and their attitudes regarding interacting with people from other countries are assessed, among other items. The assessment for the third area, understanding of basic U.S. political and economic systems, includes collecting students' attitudes about their level of understanding of the American political system as well as testing their knowledge of inalienable rights described in the Declaration of Independence, the formula for business profit, and identification of a U.S. senator from the university's state. The fourth area relates to major public relations themes, including questions regarding historical figures, theory, strategic planning, research, legal and ethical issues, and writing style.

These data are collected in a longitudinal manner in that the pre-test (given in the principles/introductory course) and post-test (given in the campaign management/capstone course) are issued each fall and spring semester. In the pre-test, both majors and non-majors are assessed to provide a means of comparison between the two groups. Because only public relations majors take the capstone course, the post-test does not include students from other majors.

### **Selected Findings**

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix for complete listing of items tested under each area assessed. For the sake of brevity, only a few of the items tested are described here.

Percentage comparisons are used to describe some of the more interesting findings from the fall 2010 pre-test in the principles course (see Appendix for full report) and the fall 2010 post-test in the capstone course.<sup>3</sup>

In testing level of competency in global issues, public relations majors (64%) just beginning their studies far outnumbered non-majors (16.7%) in their interest in becoming fluent in a new language while at the university. Sixty percent (60%) of majors assessed in the capstone course agreed, in retrospect, that studying a new language was beneficial. Nearly all public relations majors (96%) in the introductory course hoped to have a better understanding of global issues upon graduation. A majority of graduating seniors (86.7%) in the capstone course reported that they did gain a better understanding of global issues since beginning their public relations studies. In testing specific knowledge of global issues, public relations (45.8%) and other (41.7%) majors were similar in their ability to identify Sunni and Shiite as major religious divisions within Islam, but graduating seniors (73.3%) had a higher level of accuracy on this item. Only 20% of public relations majors and 12.5% of other majors in the introductory course could identify Chinese as the language spoken by the most people as their native tongue. Capstone students (26.7%) did not show much improvement in this area of questioning. Similarly, only a small proportion of public relations (20%) and other (25%) majors in the introductory course indicated they felt

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<sup>3</sup> Fall 2010 was the first time both the pre-test and post-test were administered. As such, early assessment results, as reported here, compared student responses at different points of study (e.g., sophomores vs. seniors) contemporaneously. Cohort-level comparison will be possible in fall 2012 when many of the students who took the pre-test in their fall 2010 introductory course will complete the post-test in their capstone course.

well informed about international events covered in the news, compared to graduating seniors (33.3%) who were only slightly more comfortable with international news topics.

Regarding appreciation for people of other cultures, a larger percentage of public relations majors (56%) expressed interest in studying abroad compared to their counterparts in other majors (29.1%) in the principles course. Sadly, assessment of graduating seniors in the capstone course revealed only 13.3% actually earned credits abroad while at the university. Public relations majors in the introductory course and graduating seniors in the capstone course unanimously (100%) agreed that they enjoyed learning about cultures different than their own, compared to non-majors (87.5%). A larger proportion of capstone students (93.4%) agreed that they enjoyed interacting with people from other countries, compared to 76% of public relations majors in the introductory class. Hopefully, this indicates an increased level of comfort comes with time spent in a multicultural university setting.

Assessment in the area of basic U.S. political and economic concepts revealed a larger percentage of graduating seniors (73.3%) felt they were well informed about U.S. events covered in the news compared to 48% of public relations majors and 66.7% of other majors in the principles class. Although students reported being more comfortable with domestic rather than international news, only 48% of public relations majors in the introductory course could correctly identify a U.S. senator from the university's state, compared to 79.2% of non-majors and 64.3% of graduating seniors in the capstone course. Seventy-two percent (72%) of public relations majors in the principles class correctly identified revenue minus expenses as the profit formula compared to a much

larger percentage (92.9%) of capstone students. Only 32% of public relations majors and 41.7% of non-majors in the principles class knew Hillary Clinton currently serves as U.S. secretary of state, compared to 73.3% of graduating seniors.

It is encouraging to find public relations majors (when compared to peers in other majors) have a considerably higher level of interest in learning a new language, studying abroad, and exploring other cultures. Results additionally revealed that two-thirds of public relations majors hope to own their own business one day, and twice as many public relations majors (compared to other majors) could see themselves involved in politics one day. Overall, this is a positive outlook for public relations majors at this university. What is disturbing, however, is that many of these public relations students are lacking in the political and economic knowledge needed to succeed in these endeavors. Less than half of public relations majors in the principles course could identify – when given a list of choices – the prime minister of the U.K., major religious divisions within Islam, the number of senators in the U.S. Senate, the name of a U.S. senator from their university's state, or the name of the U.S. secretary of state. Not surprisingly, less than half felt they had a good understanding of how the American political system is organized. Less than half of the students beginning their public relations coursework felt well informed about U.S. events covered in the news, and that number dropped to less than one-fourth when asked about their level of comfort with international events covered in the news. Public relations students in the principles course performed slightly better (compared to non-majors) on economic issues, with nearly three-fourths of public relations majors able to correctly identify the formula for

business profit, but just over half were able to identify, from a list, the correct definition of capitalism.

Analysis of assessment outcomes for this undergraduate public relations program to date reveals that students' global competency and appreciation for other cultures generally increases over the course of their university studies. The economic competency of these university students improves over time as well, as each public relations major is required to take an economics survey course that covers the fundamentals of microeconomics and macroeconomics. Their political literacy, however, is not growing at a desirable rate over time. As a result, the university's public relations curriculum will soon include a political science course in American national government in place of one previously open behavioral science elective.

Although informative for curriculum and pedagogical purposes, these data have limitations. As the assessment process continues, more compelling cohort-level data will be available for analysis. For example, public relations majors who took the principles course in fall 2010 will be able to be compared to graduating seniors taking the capstone course in fall 2012, reflecting the typical student's timeframe between these two classes. The multiple-choice format for most of the items tested undoubtedly produces a result different from what would be obtained with open-ended questions, and there are numerous alternative ways to operationalize the variables of interest. And, it must be recognized that there are students in the introductory course thinking public relations is going to be an "easy" major, learn differently, and depart the program. Attrition naturally affects and likely skews the comparative nature of the pre- and post-

test results. Although panel-level data would be ideal, the realities of student dynamics (e.g., timing of course scheduling, major changes) render cohort analysis as the most practical.

### **Closing the Loop**

Accrediting agencies are particularly keen to know how the assessment process results in curriculum and/or pedagogical improvements, and rightfully so. After all, what purpose does data collection serve if the findings remain on a shelf? In tandem with high expectations for evidence of closing the loop comes a national trend for reducing undergraduate degree programs to a total of 120 hours (barring accreditation requirements that require more hours for degree completion). Proponents of this credit-hour ceiling believe this restriction will help increase retention and graduation rates, which are dismally low in many parts of the U.S. (<http://www.higheredinfo.org/>). One solution for addressing student knowledge gaps in political, economic, and/or global matters is to add applicable coursework in these areas to an existing curriculum. However, universities faced with credit-hour restrictions will be hard-pressed to add courses. Alternatively, they must look for ways to incorporate political, economic, and global principles in existing courses.

Offered here are ideas for enhancing the political and economic context of public relations education that have either been implemented or are in the process of being implemented in the undergraduate public relations program discussed in this article. Obviously, faculty members at other universities who elect to use a similar assessment process need to tailor instructional responses based on their own findings, and

pedagogical methods will certainly vary for undergraduate versus graduate programs. The primary focus of these suggestions is to enhance students' political and economic fluency. These teaching ideas, designed for U.S. public relations majors, are offered with the hope that they can be useful at other institutions of higher learning and serve as a complement to literature focused on internationalizing curricula.

**Leverage public relations history:** The field's history offers rich opportunities to explore how propaganda, publicity, and other communication tactics have been used in religious crusades (Congregation for Propagation of the Faith), America's fight for independence (Sam Adams), women's suffrage (Susan B. Anthony), and war efforts (Committee on Public Information). Historical events provide an opportunity to discuss the political and economic context of the time period, and the Web is filled with accompanying visuals that enhance student learning (e.g., the World War I poster art gallery at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/gallery/posters.html>). Instructors can use U.S.-based events that are familiar to students as a starting point for discussing their global implications.

**Application Fridays:** Any day of the week can be used to break the monotony of lectures and give students an opportunity to apply what they have learned. For this activity, students are divided into four or five groups. Each group is assigned a public relations topic with political, economic, and/or global consequences (e.g., activism, crisis management, lobbying, etc., focusing on one topic per week). On his/her assigned day, each student brings a related news story to class, along with a written summary justifying how the story's contents serve as a good example of public relations

in action. Class time is dedicated to allow each student to present his/her thoughts to the class, and the opportunity is ideal to explore how economic, political, and social forces are at work on the organizations involved. This exercise provides case study analysis (satisfying students' interest in knowing how what educators teach applies in the "real world") and works well with graduate students, too, who can be expected to research sources beyond the news article. To increase interest in the exercise, instructors can distribute ballots and award bonus points to the student presenter deemed by their peers as providing the most compelling example of a public relations application each week.

**The Bonus Point Book/Film Club:** In this exercise, students are provided an opportunity to sign up for the instructor's bonus point club on the first day of class, and only the first day of class, when limited information is available for their decision-making (a blatant nod at economic thinking). An enticing award, such as significant points added to the final exam score, can be offered for those who take the "risk" and stay with the effort the entire semester. Instructors select a novel, a multi-part documentary, and/or a series of films they have enjoyed and is/are certain to get students out of their comfort zones. The surface topic need not be related to public relations, per se, but, upon closer reflection, instructors will likely find ample opportunities to tie the contents not only to public relations, but also to political, economic, and global matters. Instructors schedule eight to ten discussion groups (in-person or virtual) for this group throughout the semester, and pose questions that require students to learn more about the book's or film's historical, political, economic and/or cultural context. Students will

leave the experience intellectually enriched, and instructors are likely to have increasing demand for membership in the club each semester.

As an example, the author plans to use the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole (who once taught at her university), for this purpose. It is a hysterical, brilliant read that should resonate well with students familiar with its New Orleans setting. The first chapter offers an opportunity to discuss the era of McCarthyism and its associated communication tactics while enjoying a piece of entertaining literature outside of an English course. An excellent documentary for this exercise is PBS' *Freedom: A History of Us*. Several episodes are available on the website (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/historyofus/>). International films that highlight cultural nuances or major world events are great choices, too. For example, Ben Kingsley's 1982 award-winning portrayal in the film *Ghandi* offers an opportunity for students to write about how Ghandi used each of the four models of public relations in his epic fight for India's independence.

**Leverage the CSR lecture:** Instructors can use this opportunity to introduce the free market principles put forth by Adam Smith and explore their influence on U.S. public relations practice. Milton Friedman's (1970) controversial treatise on the social responsibility of business is a worthwhile inclusion, as is a comparison of shareholder primacy to the stakeholder model so prevalently taught in public relations. Market economies can be compared and contrasted with those more centrally controlled in other nations. Transitional economies (and the adjacent evolution of public relations practices/models in these nations) can be discussed by drawing upon public relations

journal articles and international public relations texts to draw clear ties between political/economic frameworks and public relations practice. International students can add their observations of the American economy and how it compares to that of their homelands. YouTube is filled with related clips (some entertaining and informative, some clearly biased) that can be incorporated in this lecture, and search engines can locate outlines to get instructors started.

**Utilize research and campaign management classes:** Instructors can assign research topics related to local political campaigns, upcoming ballot issues, or controversial economic development programs in the surrounding geographical area. While students are learning about public opinion, they are likewise learning about citizenship, free speech, regulation, and the political process. In a research methods course, the author used U.S. political ideology as the basis for an assignment on scale development and validity testing. Students were provided with a dozen or so statements, each affiliated with either conservative or liberal thought. Students had to create a scale for each ideology. Correct statement allocation naturally provided higher Cronbach alpha values. Although the students did better than expected, their grade was based on how well they interpreted their statistical result, not how accurately they divided the statements. The assignment did allow, however, a brief and objective discussion of the differences between these ideologies in class. Under the author's direction, a recent class of graduating seniors worked with the local community health care clinic for their capstone campaign project. By semester's end, the students were

well versed in the intricacies of health care reform and learned firsthand how public policy affects public relations practice.

**Create a portfolio:** Students, beginning in their freshman year, can create portfolios (online or hard copy) to reflect their developing competencies in global and civic matters. The author's university will soon implement a pilot of this program, in which students will be required to earn a set number of "points" over the course of their university studies. Students may choose from a wide array of activities and courses designed to enhance global, economic, and political understanding, but they must complete a certain portion of the portfolio before being admitted into upper division and the entirety of the portfolio prior to graduation. For example, a student who writes an essay about his/her attendance at an international student event on campus earns fewer points than would a student who completes a foreign language sequence or studies abroad, but all three activities would count toward global competency points. Economic and civic points can be earned by students who start a business, become a shareholder, volunteer for a political campaign, or complete a related internship while in college. Each activity requires certain documentation, which can be reviewed and approved during the advising process each semester. Alternatively, activities can be incorporated into existing class assignments and designated for portfolio points. Creation of such a portfolio ensures that students are engaged in a variety of experiences to influence the attitudes, values, and skills Reimers (2009) stated as vital to global competency. In addition, students can use the portfolio to distinguish themselves in job interviews.

Each of these pedagogical tools enhances critical thinking, and hands-on involvement makes the lessons more compelling. The activities can be implemented for undergraduate or graduate students without excessive resources, cost, or administrative burden. Most importantly, these exercises demonstrate the interconnectivity of social, political, and economic issues on a global basis, and they get students thinking in an interdisciplinary manner that will serve them well as public relations counselors.

### **Conclusions**

Generally speaking, students drawn to the study of public relations tend to be outgoing, interactive, and professionally minded individuals. Not surprisingly, as found in this research, they often express a considerably higher interest than their peers in learning a new language, traveling and working abroad, owning a business, and seeking political office. Although their enthusiastic, open-minded optimism is encouraging, public relations educators need to ensure that these future professionals have the political and economic literacy required to succeed in whichever line of work they choose. The public relations literature has done much to encourage the internationalizing of curricula and instruction, but less attention has been paid to the importance of developing political, civic, and economic literacy among public relations majors. Pedagogical tools offered in this article provide opportunities to get students engaged in issues and events that have domestic and global implications for public

relations practice. The professionalism of the field and the credibility of these young professionals depend, to a great extent, on their working knowledge of, and ability to aptly maneuver within, the political and economic spheres that affect every organization, regardless of size, geography, or culture.

Although a formal, ongoing assessment process is essential for curriculum development and adaptation, a formidable obstacle familiar to anyone who has taught university students is getting students as interested in knowing the names of world leaders as they are in the latest celebrity gossip. Today's students are no less capable of increasing their political and economic knowledge, but they live in a digital age that allows them to filter content in such a way that international news and economic forecasts may have little chance of reaching them (e.g., Bauerlein, 2008). Public relations educators can be effective intermediaries by enhancing the political and economic context of lectures and class activities, thereby enriching the lessons students are eager to learn and greatly improving their ability to serve as organizational counselors. Future research examining the effectiveness of related pedagogical methods would be both worthwhile and welcomed.

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## Appendix

Fall 2010 Pre-Test Assessment Results from Principles of Public Relations  
Number of students assessed: 49 (25 public relations majors, 24 non-majors)

Note: Percentages related to majors are in bold, compared to non-majors' percentages in parentheses. Items marked with asterisk used a 5-point Likert agreement scale; others offered a choice of 5 answers.

### Area 1: Level of Competency in Global Issues

#### **Percentage who agreed or strongly agreed that:**

- \*They hope to become fluent in a new language while in college: **64%** (16.7%)
- \*They are well informed about international events covered in the news: **20%** (25%)
- \*A college education should make him/her a more worldly person: **92%** (75%)
- \*They hope to have a better understanding of global issues upon graduation: **96%** (87.5%)

#### **Percentage who correctly identified the following:**

- Sunni and Shiite as major religious divisions within Islam: **45.8%** (41.7%)
- Chinese as language spoken by the most people as their native tongue: **20%** (12.5%)
- South America as location of the Amazon Rain Forest: **52%** (70.8%)
- David Cameron as Prime Minister of the UK: **37.5%** (45.8%)
- 1.02 billion as the number of people in the world without enough to eat: **36%** (33.3%)
- Definition of globalization: **87.5%** (87%)

### Area 2: Appreciation for People of Other Cultures

#### **Percentage who agreed or strongly agreed that:**

- \*They are interested in studying abroad while in college: **56%** (29.1%)
- \*They like learning about cultures different from their own: **100%** (87.5%)
- \*Students from different countries can learn a lot from each other: **92%** (100%)
- \*They generally enjoy interacting with people from other countries: **76%** (91.7%)
- \*They have an interest in world travel: **80%** (91.7%)

### Area 3: Understanding of Basic Concepts Shaping U.S. Political and Economic Systems

#### **Percentage who agreed or strongly agreed that:**

- \*They are well informed about U.S. events covered in the news: **48%** (66.7%)
- \*They could see themselves involved in politics one day: **40%** (20.8%)
- \*They have a good understanding of how the American political system is organized: **48%** (70.8%)
- \*They hope to own a business one day: **68%** (66.6%)

**Percentage who correctly identified the following:**

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as inalienable rights in the Declaration of Independence: **88%** (87.5%)

Revenue minus expenses as business profit: **72%** (65.2%)

Three branches of U.S. government: **88%** (87.5%)

Definition of free enterprise/capitalism: **52%** (47.8%)

The number of senators comprising the U.S. Senate: **32%** (45.8%)

The main theme of MLK's *I Have a Dream* speech: **76%** (83.3%)

A U.S. Senator from the university's state: **48%** (79.2%)

Free speech as a guarantee of the First Amendment: **87.5%** (87.5%)

Hillary Clinton as U.S. Secretary of State: **32%** (41.7%)

R&D as a likely contributor to innovation in the computer industry: **76%** (70.8%)

A price increase as a result of higher demand, unchanging supply: **84%** (70.8%)