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Public Relations

An Opportunity to Influence the Media

In 1992, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) chose “At the Crossroads” as the theme for its annual conference. As public relations professionals and educators met in Kansas City in October of that year, it was noted that the conference theme could well be the theme of their discussions on multiculturalism in public relations as well. This is because 1992 and much of the 1990s were years of discussion, dialogue, and debate on issues of race, diversity, and multiculturalism. Both public relations educators and professionals found themselves “at the crossroads” as they met to discuss and map out their own diversity plan for the industry.

The case for the diversity agenda in public relations education involves more than social justice and demography. It involves more than urging others to “do the right thing”; as former Newspaper Association of America President Cathie Black said, it involves urging others to “do the thing right.” And it should go beyond simply mimicking the efforts of the print, broadcast, and advertising industries to become racially and culturally inclusive. It is an initiative that could be driven by the very essence of this nation’s professed democratic ideals: freedom of speech.

Print journalists and journalism educators are quick to package their work in the wrappings of the First Amendment and rightfully proclaim their right to a free press. Similarly, advertisers present arguments for the right of commercial free speech, and broadcasters warn against the threats to free press and free speech that they believe are posed by government regulation. The case for the sometimes competing First Amendment rights of print media, broadcasters, advertisers, and new media technologies is most often fashioned and focused by public relations professionals.

But where is the public relations profession in this turf battle for the First Amendment high ground? On many campuses, its place in the mass

communication curriculum is affected by the “last hired, first fired” mentality that people of color also have faced for many years. Public relations is sometimes seen as an adjunct to other media training, not a profession that can or should exist on its own. Its place on campus is often argued within and among educators both in and out of schools of journalism and mass communication. Administrators eagerly accept the large public relations enrollment numbers, but many question the value of the curriculum.

When it comes to the importance of a diversity agenda, however, multiculturalism in public relations should be a primary objective. If public relations practitioners and educators were to wrap themselves in the First Amendment rights of freedom of expression, the free marketplace of ideas, and the right to both send and receive information, they would find their case parallels the need for diversity raised by other media professions.

In many ways, the practice of public relations is like the practice of law. Public relations professionals believe in the free marketplace of ideas, just as lawyers believe in the legal system. Just as attorneys believe that everyone deserves his or her day in court, public relations practitioners believe, or should believe, that every viewpoint deserves to have its best case made in the court of public opinion. Just as attorneys learn to craft legal arguments before court, public relations professionals are skilled in shaping the public presentation of the viewpoints of those whom they represent to the media and the public. The message is important, but most important is the right of a message to be expressed and received. Less important is the messenger.

Public Relations’ Influence on the News Media

This is a lesson two of the authors of this book learned in the 1960s when, finding themselves with a journalism education but no real opportunity to enter the nearly all-White newsrooms of Southern California general circulation newspapers, they did public relations for the Black Student Union and United Mexican American Students, community organizations, and antipoverty agencies to present the issues of Chicanos and Blacks to the news media. Much of this work involved gaining coverage for pickets, protests, demonstrations, marches, and all the other activism associated with the 1960s. But it also focused on gaining coverage and understanding of the need for youth job training, community credit unions, neighborhood beautification efforts, and drug diversion programs.

In the authors’ efforts, two important lessons were learned that had not been taught in the process of earning their journalism degrees. For one, they learned that public relations workers are critical to the selection and presentation of the day’s news. Second, they learned that journalists too often file inaccurate stories about non-Whites because they are influenced

by biases and misconceptions about other racial and cultural groups. At the very least, this results in a lack of proper perspective in news reporting.

In the 1960s, this meant that news professionals often portrayed stories from the Black and Latino communities in terms of conflict, activism, and militancy. Too often they covered public demonstrations for civil rights by focusing on the demonstrators instead of the issues that necessitated the demonstration. In the 21st century, journalists too often focus on people of color as “problem people,” either beset by problems or causing them for the larger society, and as “zoo stories,” focusing on these communities during colorful observances of Chinese New Year, Kwanzaa, Mexican Independence Day, or Native American powwows. Once again, journalists still often see these communities through a lens that filters out certain elements of the story while allowing others to pass through to the audience.

Racial diversity in public relations can help sensitize journalism students and news professionals. Public relations expertise and experience are needed to forcefully, effectively, and accurately present the reality of the diverse cultural groups that now make up our nation to the news and information media. Public relations professionals are also needed to help journalists overcome their misunderstandings of racially and culturally diverse communities if they are to accurately report on those communities.

The need for multiculturalism in public relations is no less strong today than it was in the 1960s. With increased racial diversity in the United States—coupled with the proliferation of targeted, segmented, and micro media—the need for people of color to learn and practice public relations is more important than ever. Similarly, public relations students of all races and cultural backgrounds must learn to appreciate and understand cross-cultural communication if they are eventually to be effective in the profession. These skills will be even more important over the next generation as more persons from racially diverse backgrounds assume positions in public communications endeavors.

Diversity in Public Relations: The Need to Reflect Demographic Growth and Changes

A Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) diversity report issued in December 2011 that, as future public relations specialists, students seeking careers in the field need to understand how people with differences can work together to communicate effectively. The Commission on Public Relations Education also notes that successful managers in all types of organizations now recognize that a diverse employee workforce “recruited, trained and retained” can deliver valuable insights and performance with regard to marketing, strategic planning, human resources, and management issues. Furthermore, it is currently recognized in higher education

that a “culture of inclusion” has been encouraged—if not mandated—with new standards for accreditation of schools of journalism/mass communication and certification programs in public relations. Moreover, trade associations, research foundations, and professional societies in public relations now emphasize the need for diversity and offer training and workshops to promote diversity in the field.¹

The Commission on Public Relations Education’s 2006 report asserted that public relations practitioners, educators, and students need to develop an introspective awareness of their own individual cultures, socialization, and privileges, and must recognize the pitfalls of being ethnocentric in their thoughts and approaches to managing public relations projects and teams.² As Michael Palenchar, a public relations professor at the University of Tennessee, notes, “Like society as a whole, the PR field finds itself struggling with the role of diversity,” and he believes that “at the core of PR scholarship should be the concepts of mutual respect, collaboration, appreciation for a wide range of perspectives and the creation of a platform for the open and transparent engagement of the marketplace of ideas.” He adds that diversity should encompass much more than gender or ethnicity, and also include intellectual, experiential, and workplace diversity.³

The Commission on Public Relations Education subscribes to this notion, and asserts that diversity in public relations generally takes two forms: intercultural/multicultural communication and diversity management. The growing reach of our global economy into all corners of the world supports this need for today’s public relations practitioners to learn how to navigate multicultural and multiethnic environments and understand how diverse populations play a role in each aspect of a public relations project from research and planning to communication and evaluation. Equally important is the ability to hire, manage, and retain diverse teams, which will enhance the development of “best practices” campaigns and solutions that are both innovative and effective.⁴

In 1990, the U.S. Census Bureau counted 167,000 persons working as public relations specialists. Of these, 14% were people of color: 7% Black, 4.3% Hispanic, 1.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.3% Native American/Eskimo/Aleut.⁵ This is about the same percentage as those in broadcast newsrooms at the time.

By 2010, the number of public relations practitioners nearly doubled to 311,000, and these professionals now compose roughly 10% of all occupations in the United States. However, while the number of public relations practitioners nearly doubled, the percentage comprising people of color essentially remained stagnant at 14.1%. The number of African Americans in the field actually declined while Asians saw only a modest increase among public relations practitioners. It is interesting to note, however, that Bureau of Labor Statistics data showed that by 2010 the number of Latinos in the field nearly doubled to 8.7% of public relations specialists and 9.7%

of advertising and promotions managers. In the public relations manager category, Latinos experienced a more modest increase of 5.2%.

On the other hand, the number of African American public relations specialists fell to 2.8% in 2010, and they composed only a mere 0.8% of advertising and promotions managers and 4.4% of all public relations managers. Asians composed only 2.6% of public relations practitioners, 2.3% of advertising and promotions managers, and 4.6% of all public relations managers in the field.⁶

With Latinos now the largest ethnic group and one of the fastest growing minority groups—along with Asians—in the United States, it is imperative for organizations to diversify the public relations workforce to better understand and serve their increasingly diverse target audiences. U.S. Census Bureau figures from 2010 indicate that, between 2000 and 2010, the Latino population grew by 43%—rising to 50.5 million—while the Asian population showed the fastest growth and increased by 43% to 14.7 million in 2010. Latinos now compose 16% of the total U.S. population—but only half that percentage is reflected in the number of current public relations practitioners.⁷

Publicist Simone Smalls is founder and president of Simone Smalls Public Relations Inc., a New York–based full-service public relations and strategic marketing agency launched in 2008 that specializes in entertainment, sports, and celebrity public relations and marketing.



Source: Joe Corrigan/Stringer/Getty Images Entertainment/Getty Images.

The Importance of Minority Publics

The increase in money spent by African American, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Native American consumers has made them more attractive as targets for advertising and the media that advertisers support. If current trends continue, these markets will soon compose about 30% of the American population. These figures made people of color attractive as consumers and advertising targets during much of the 1980s and 1990s. But the diversity message need not stop there. Instead, it should be extended to include the positive values that a diversified workforce brings to an organization's ability to understand and communicate to audiences of different races, cultures, languages, and nationalities. This is a point that was made by Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, a scholar who analyzed multicultural trends in public relations. She noted, "Public relations and marketing

executives should realize what an asset they have in their own employees of fellow officers who are African American, Native American, Latin American or Asian American. Members of these communities are also valuable assets when companies attempt to communicate and market to other countries . . . by bridging cultural and communication gaps.”⁸

As far back as the late 1980s, Gloster and Cherrie (1987) found that companies realized they must reach all of the racial and ethnic groups in their markets and in their communities in order to be successful. That increasing awareness has led to greater opportunities in the form of growing numbers of minority-owned advertising and public relations firms and in the form of aggressive recruiting of Black, Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American professionals by other firms.⁹

However, according to the Ford and Appelbaum (2005) survey of multicultural public relations, about 57% percent of the non-White practitioner sample perceived the industry to be only somewhat successful in retaining a diverse workforce. Roughly 60% of the sample responded that multicultural practitioners were put on slow-moving tracks in their jobs, and about 63% reported that they had to be more qualified than Whites. Moreover, about 55% reported not being afforded the same opportunities as Whites, 53% said that some employers didn’t want diverse practitioners working for them, and 54% reported experiencing subtle discrimination by their employers and coworkers.¹⁰

Even with the Census Bureau’s admitted undercounting of people of color in mind, it should be clear that public relations has a long way to go to narrow the gap between the estimated 14% that minorities make up of the public relations workforce and their overall population that approaches 30%. Until positive steps are taken in that direction, the public relations profession will continue to encounter difficulties in capitalizing on the multicultural and multinational opportunities described by Kern-Foxworth and others.

Diversity in Public Relations: Good Business

According to PRowl Public Relations, the student-run PR firm at Temple University, the importance of diversity-driven planning in today’s business world is essential to success, and it asserts that the public relations profession must play a crucial role in developing diversity awareness to achieve their company’s objectives.¹¹ Jaya Bohlmann, public relations vice president for Sodexo Inc., said that diversity is important because “the job of any good PR professional is to fully understand their client to achieve their client’s overall objectives” and, “without recognizing diversity, the PR department could not do its job, because they would not fully understand their client’s perspective.” Gorki De Los Santos, communications manager

for Coca-Cola, adds that “diversity, both in the marketplace and workplace, is critical to the company’s sustainability” and that “diversity is crucial for a business’ survival in today’s competitive market.”¹²

PRSA, the industry trade association, has proclaimed that the profession “should reflect the great diversity that exists” and that all practitioners “have a role to play in ensuring public relations is representative of the diverse publics it serves.” However, according to a 2009 *PRWeek* survey, more than 85% of respondents either “strongly” or “somewhat” agreed that the industry “has a problem recruiting ethnically diverse professionals,” and 69% said the industry “has a problem retaining ethnically diverse professionals.”¹³

This notion was confirmed when *PRWeek* released its 2011 “Power List” of the top 50 PR professionals and did not include a single African American PR practitioner. Sakita Holley, CEO of House of Success, told *PRNewser* that the list made it seem as though there were no African Americans making progress in the industry, which she said was not true. In response, *PRWeek* editor-in-chief Steve Barrett issued a response stating that individuals on the list were chosen not because of the color of their skin, their gender, or their sexual orientation, but rather by the power and influence they wield. But Kim Hunter, president and CEO of Lagrant Communications, may have summed it best when he said, “Your refusal to acknowledge the significant contributions of African Americans in our industry is one of the primary reasons so many people of color do not find our industry welcoming or a viable career option.” Rosanna M. Fiske, chair and CEO of PRSA, weighed in with a statement that noted, “Any list that attempts to rank the industry’s most powerful or influential players should reflect the great diversity that exists within the profession as well as the diverse meanings of power and influence . . . to do so successfully, an organization’s communications must represent the diverse range of voices and demographics that it attempts to reach.”¹⁴

Women of Color in Public Relations

Although women now compose the majority of students majoring in public relations in colleges across the United States as well as in the profession, women of color are still woefully underrepresented in the public relations practice. While women in the profession compose 58.6% of all public relations specialists, 61.1% of advertising and promotions managers, and 60% of public relations managers, it is unclear how many are women of color. Grunig and Toth (2006) found that of the 60%–70% of public relations practitioners who are women, the majority undisputedly consists of White females.¹⁵ Moreover, females now compose the majority of PR students today—and on some campuses they outnumber males by as much as 10 to

1. However, with males composing only about 20% of PR programs across the nation, they nevertheless appear to enter the field at higher levels or are promoted at a faster rate since 40% are in management positions.¹⁶

Dr. Amanda Gallagher at Texas Tech University believes that PR is facing issues of diversity that are shaping how the field is developing. “A large part of the PR work force is made up of women . . . among PR students today, 70–80 percent of them are women.”¹⁷ Consequently, PR students need to be educated concerning this demographic shift in the workforce.

Similarly, Dr. Lynne Sallot at the University of Georgia believes that PR is an excellent career choice for women. Having taught and worked with an eclectic range of students, peers, and supervisors, she said that she has “gained

from their diversity of thought and perspective, as much as their diversity of gender and ethnicity,” and that they “will have very prestigious and power career opportunities in management that women in other professions do not yet enjoy.”¹⁸

Although determining the numbers of minority women working in public relations is difficult, Pompper (2004) estimated that only 4.5% of management public relations jobs were held by African American women, while 39% were held by White women and 48.3% by White men. Pompper also reported that focus groups of African American women who considered themselves valuable employees said “their organizations consistently discriminated against them, rendered them voiceless, excluded them, and poorly compensated them.”¹⁹

In addition, women of color in the public relations profession typically play markedly different roles in the workplace, which in turn may hinder their potential career advancement. An earlier study by Len-Rios (1998) found that there are also distinct gender differences in perceived and actual discrimination. In her sample of 13 African American, Asian American, and

Yvette Noel-Schure (right), former senior vice president of Columbia Records, best known for her work with Beyoncé, was featured at the African American Public Relations Collective’s “Conversation with Yvette Noel-Schure: How Music Publicists Help Artists Sizzle!”



Source: J. Merritt/Contributor/FilmMagic/Getty Images.

Hispanic American practitioners, she found that men recalled more instances of overt racism than did women. To explain this, she suggested three possible reasons: First, managers may not feel as threatened by women in the workplace, and consequently may be less likely to openly discriminate against them. Second, she surmised that women of color perceive less discrimination than do men of color because they are used to accommodating to and rationalizing the behavior of others. Third, she proposed that women may feel more disadvantaged by their gender than by their race.²⁰

Minority practitioners are often further disadvantaged by being pigeonholed in nonprofit or government jobs. They are commonly hired to fill quotas or serve in “show positions” with little significant input into policymaking and limited access to upward mobility or the higher-paying corporate jobs. Finally, it is not uncommon for minority practitioners to be hired primarily to communicate with minority audiences. According to a 1993 study by Kern-Foxworth, about one third of Black practitioners surveyed indicated that they direct their efforts to minority “markets.”²¹

When minority practitioners exclusively handle minority issues, they tend to bear the burden of being the race representative, much like the token woman who is expected to serve as the voice for *all* women. Often Black practitioners in mainstream organizations find themselves the sole member of their race in an entire public relations department. They consequently are consulted on issues related to African American publics, and have to interpret—whether directly or indirectly—their culture for non-African Americans.²²

Those in the field have mixed, though somewhat positive, feelings about their professional field. Gilliam’s qualitative study of 10 Black women who are public relations managers mentioned the importance to target Black women as heads of households, the need for successful Black women to share their experiences, and that the Black participants more than Whites felt that Whites were uncomfortable working with Blacks. The study cited an Atlanta survey showing that, although women outnumbered men two to one in public relations, their earnings were lower, and that Black women earned less than White women.²³

As the fastest growing ethnic minority population, Hispanic women are making significant strides in the public relations profession. In 2002, Rosanna M. Fiske received the D. Parke Gibson Pioneer Award—named after the pioneer in multicultural public relations who authored two books on African American consumerism. Fiske was the first Hispanic woman named president of the PRSA Miami Chapter, and was director of account service for JGR & Associates, Florida’s largest Hispanic PR agency, where she led all of the agency’s public relations efforts for the general, U.S. Hispanic, and Latin American markets. She was recognized for her multicultural understanding and expertise, and development of successful bilingual programs for local, national, and international clients such as Charles Schwab, American Airlines, Wells Fargo, and MCI.²⁴

Building a Multicultural Foundation for Public Relations

Diversity of the population is continuing to translate into diversity of messages and messengers and create multiple opportunities for public relations practitioners and educators. As far back as the early 1990s, PR firm Ketchum's senior vice president and director of media services, Jonathan Schenker, cited increased demographic diversity as one of 10 key media trends, noting that demographics will have a huge influence on the PR industry and that people of color will be featured as matters of fact, not as exceptions to the rule.

"Consider these audiences when creating press kits, and hiring spokespeople," Schenker wrote. "Multiple spokespeople might be necessary for some national campaigns." Schenker forecast continued diversity and demassification on the media side as well, predicting a continuation of the trend of narrowcasting and media targeting to special audiences. He noted, "Expect more of these [targeted] publications and an equal, if not higher, number of them to fail."²⁵

Many cited perceived discrimination based on race in terms of either promotions, access to a project, access to a public relations position, or salary increases. A moderate relationship was perceived between leaving the field and perceived discrimination. High satisfaction level indicates public relations professionals of color have developed coping mechanisms to endure what they perceive as a hostile environment.²⁶

Kern-Foxworth's earlier survey of 196 non-White public relations professionals found the typical respondent to be a Black female, age 38, who had worked for nine years in public relations and attained a middle-level position, earning \$38,337 per year. More than half had degrees in journalism, public relations, or communications. Having a journalism degree was more important than degrees in other areas in determining role. Those with journalism degrees were more likely to be responsible for writing, editing, and producing material to present management's position, but were less likely to guide management through step-by-step planning and programming: "The analysis supports the assumption that larger organizations do not allow minorities the opportunity to advance in their careers. The more people employed in the organization for which minorities work, the lower their salaries and the less chance they have to become expert prescribers."

Kern-Foxworth also found a gap between the role that minorities assign to themselves (middle-level management) and the role that they actually fulfill (communication technician, not problem solver). "The misconception indicates that what they perceive perhaps is not the reality of the situation."²⁷

No doubt their skills are increasingly needed in developing management strategies and media messages. Kern-Foxworth asserted that one of

the reasons R.J. Reynolds' \$10 million African American–targeted venture in Uptown cigarettes went up in smoke is because the company did not use a Black agency to research and assess community and opinion-leader reactions in the targeted community.²⁸

Diversity Practices in Public Relations Education

Public relations educators have both an excellent opportunity for advancement and a clear agenda of needs to be addressed. Some of the obstacles to overcome:

1. Too few non-White students are oriented toward journalism once they reach college. They know little about journalism, and other professions are better known to them. Educators and high school and college counselors should identify and reinforce the high achievers with the motivation and drive to be successful.
2. Professors should use racially and culturally inclusive textbooks and classroom materials in their teaching. There has been little research on inclusiveness of textbooks, which have a great influence in portraying the field, its practice, and its practitioners to aspirants and students of the field.
3. People of color are not newcomers to the profession, nor are their newspaper histories separate from their public relations history. The first Black, Native American, and Asian American newspapers in this country were all founded as public relations or public advocacy vehicles: *El Misisipi* to rail against Napoleon's takeover of Spain, *Freedom's Journal* "to plead our own cause," the *Cherokee Phoenix* to advocate a tribal identity and disseminate tribal news to the Cherokees and the native viewpoint to a wider audience, and *The Golden Hills' News* to Christianize the Chinese and to gain respect for them among the 49ers in the California gold rush.

A Public Relations Education Diversity Agenda

By explaining to their students the economic advantages of working in a corporate environment and stressing the opportunities for community service as part of public relations, professors can help students understand the unique opportunities in public relations. Community involvement is encouraged, not discouraged, on the public relations side of the communications profession.

In its ongoing commitment to diversity, PRSA is now represented by PRSSA chapters at 13 historically Black colleges and 27 schools that have been accredited by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. PRSSA has also created its own pathways to diversity by offering internship opportunities and scholarships to its minority members.²⁹

The other media professional associations, such as the American Society of News Editors, offer models of multicultural programs that public relations faculty and professionals can replicate, emulate, and improve upon. Similarly, non-White professional associations can also help to establish links for internships, mentors, part-time faculty, and campus speakers. The Los Angeles-based Hispanic Public Relations Association's 80 to 100 members annually raise \$10,000 in scholarships and look for contacts on campus.

Mentoring programs with professionals, internships, early tracking, and a national competition to select, train, place, and track students will help to attract and keep the best students in public relations. Contacts with historically Black colleges, schools that are members of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, and campuses with large minority student enrollment will also help identify and nurture public relations faculty and students. Such contacts should be seen as a two-way street. Public relations agencies and educators who have only focused on general audiences can learn from the students and faculty at predominantly non-White campuses as they work with them.

In a world of "demassified" society and media, those who are aware and able to function in more than one culture and to work in more than one medium will be the most advantaged. Public relations students and professionals must know how to communicate with people of all cultures and to use all the media at their disposal. Therefore, it is crucial that they gain an understanding of the crossover skills necessary to effectively communicate with diverse audiences through diverse media.

A Public Relations Professional Diversity Agenda

Though specialized public relations agencies were among the first to make corporate America and government agencies aware of effective ways to reach communities of color through targeted campaigns dating back to the early 20th century, PRSA did not start its own Multicultural Communications Section until 1997, as an outgrowth of its National Multicultural Affairs Committee, which began in 1980.

"From its inception, the Section has been dedicated to championing multiculturalism and nurturing the careers of ethnically diverse public relations practitioners," said chair Rhonda Welsh at a 2003 teleconference on U.S. Hispanics sponsored by the Multicultural Communications Section. Citing

the Census Bureau's projection that by 2040 nearly half of all Americans will be what are now called "minorities," she added that "the numbers suggest that our organizations in general and our practice specifically must realize the importance of building relationships with all of our publics."³⁰

Some public relations firms, such as internationally renowned Fleishman-Hillard and Lagrant Communications, have recognized the need to diversify their workforce to meet the shifting demographics of target audiences by offering minority scholarship and training programs. In the mid-1990s, Fleishman-Hillard's Los Angeles office created a minority internship training program whereby the firm recruited qualified minority juniors and seniors from regional colleges and universities who were interested in pursuing careers in the public relations field. One candidate, an African American female selected in the second year of the program, said she was the only person of color in the entire office. She was subsequently hired full-time and transferred to the firm's office in Chicago.³¹

The 2003 PRSA Multicultural Communications Section conducted several national programs to fulfill its vision to serve "as a link between multicultural issues, practitioners and the society." Activities included multicultural events at the PRSA convention, multicultural scholarships for promising students, a quarterly newsletter and increased outreach to leaders of ethnic public relations associations, other professional societies, and PRSA accreditation training for ethnic public relations associations.

Partnering with ethnic public relations associations, such as the Hispanic Public Relations Association and Hispanic Marketing and Communication Association, PRSA's teleseminar cosponsors, has helped general market public relations associations and agencies link with the nation's growing racial and ethnic groups and the media that serve them. In so doing, the ethnic professional organizations and PR agencies have been able to go beyond translating press releases into other languages and putting a racial happy face on an already established campaign. Instead, they contribute their creative expertise and knowledge of different racial and ethnic communities to influence the content and focus of these campaigns so they will be more effective.

The task for increasing diversity in the public relations profession is twofold: It must start with university public relations curricula and programs as well as become an integral part of the corporate model and business agenda. PRSA recognized this need to expand diversity both in PR programs and in the profession when it established a national Diversity Committee in 2003. Its objective was to develop a more inclusive professional society by reaching and involving members who represent diverse genders, ethnicities, races, and sexual orientations, and by providing them with dedicated professional development opportunities and support to help them succeed in public relations. It also instituted a Chapter Diversity Award as a way to recognize PRSA chapters that are embracing diversity and inclusion. However, PRSA still has a way to go to achieve equity in

diversity, since 87% of its members are White. The organization reported only a 6% increase in minority membership between 2005 and 2011.³²

PRSA is also attempting to accomplish greater diversity by providing a “PR Planning Toolkit” that provides a comprehensive list of multicultural/diversity contact names and organizations for reaching African American, Arab American, Asian American, Disabled American, LGBTQ, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American organizations. Other practical guidelines offer tips on how to communicate with diverse publics for each phase of the public relations planning process. These guidelines explain how practitioners can choose effective communication strategies with regard to rhetorical styles, tone, language, and spokespersons in the research, strategy, tactics, and evaluation stages to create a “best practices” approach to working with diverse audiences.³³

Some corporate organizations—such as Coca-Cola, Xerox, and American Express—are also committed to enhancing diversity in their workforce by offering education and training programs, by encouraging minority and female-based businesses as suppliers, and by communicating company initiatives through guest speakers, programs, and networks, both within and outside of the company. As Chief Diversity Officer Kerrie Peraino of American Express noted, diversity is important because it “creates a culture of inclusion” and “drives business success,” and PR departments can help diversity initiatives by communicating both to their employees and to their customer base about how the company values diversity and what programs it has to maintain diversity—not only when managing within the company, but also when catering to the needs of its clientele.³⁴

The multicultural/multilingual understanding and skills that men and women of color bring into the public relations profession are important in effectively communicating to and with all American communities. As they become more valued by the public relations profession, people of all races and ethnicities who have these skills will also become more valuable to the corporations, nonprofit agencies, and public relations organizations and governments that employ them.

Notes

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