

## **DIFFERENT SIDES OF THE SAME COIN: MIXED VIEWS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATORS AND PRACTITIONERS ABOUT PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION**

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### **ÖZET**

*Public relations education is a topic of seemingly perpetual importance and interest for practitioners and educators alike. In recent years, numerous researches have surveyed both practitioners and educators to identify appropriate ways to strengthen public relations education to prepare students for practitioner's role. According to these research results public relations educators and practitioners disagree about the priorities they assign to qualities and goals of public relations education. The current article explains different taught about public relations education under cover of literature. Then it informs about research results which conducted to public relations educators and practitioners about public relations education in Turkey. The research result points out there is not sufficient agreement between educators and practitioners about public relations curriculum, assessment techniques, desired skills and outcomes.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Public relations education, public relations educators, practitioners.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Public relations is not only communication but also it is closely related to different areas like sociology, community psychology, law, political science, public administration etc. (Kazancı, 2003:134) "Education is the crucial plank in public relations' quest for professional status. It is education that can provide the cognitive core to the occupation and thus help define the field of jurisdiction". L'Etang, 2002:47) Historically, PR education has been mix of liberal arts education and professional training. Students have been taught not only how to communicate but also what to communicate and why is appropriate.(Morton, 1999) Professionalism is dependent on a high level of sophistication presented through formal education.(Ehling, 1992:463) "Public relations education, as with any branch of education, needs to stand on two principal pillars: a comprehensive body of knowledge and a pool of qualified educators who can impart, and contribute to the building of, this body of knowledge." (Sriramesh,2002:55) Wilcox, Ault and Agee pointed that "those who plan careers in public relations should develop four basic abilities, no matter what area of work they enter. These are writing skills, research ability, planning expertise and problem-solving ability" (Wilcox, Ault, Agee, 1998:82) So that, there has been taught that public relations education should contain these skills' training.

### **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

In recent years, numerous researches have surveyed both practitioners and educators to identify appropriate ways to strengthen public relations education to prepare students for practitioner's role. For example, in Turk's research (1989) non-communication skills, technical skills, problem-solving and budgeting were mentioned items for public relations education.

Wakefield and Cottone (1986; 1987) suggested that the public relations curriculum should be expanded beyond writing to management perspective. Anderson, argued that marketing and management courses and research, planning and evaluation were the essential for public relations education.

In their article Berkowitz, Hristodoulakis argued that education plays a significant role in a managerial-oriented perception among public relations practitioners. Students planning careers as public relations practitioners need to be trained in strategically solving public relations problems. The technical aspects of public relations practice must also be presented from this perspective.( Berkowitz, Hristodoulakis 1999:100)

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Eaton (2000), Haberstroh (1995), mentioned that writing skills were really important for public relations and this skills have to be part of curriculum. In 1999 Coombs and Rybacki published an article about the role of pedagogy in public relations education.

Elliott and Koper mentioned that "PR education should focus on PR theory, PR skills, management theory and practice, communication and research" (Elliott, Koper, 2002:21).

Sriramesh pointed that "in order to prepare PR students in various parts of the world to become effective multicultural professionals it is essential for experiences and perspectives from other continents to be integrated into PR education". (Sriramesh,2002:54)

Rawel argued that "all practitioners are supposed to be knowledgeable about communication theory and practice, without any recognition that strategic thinkers may require a more sophisticated grasp of the potential, or indeed the possibility, of genuine two-way communication". (Rawel, 2002:72) Therefore, public relations education have to include these training issues. Theoretical classes are needed because they are effective for the student's perception and explanation skills of the world (Kazancı, 2003:135)

Hatzios and Lorisey suggested that in today's business environment international public relations has critical importance so that it has to be a part of public relations education. "PR practitioners are increasingly working with their clients or colleagues in other countries, creating campaign materials that will be translated into multiple languages, and considering the global impacts of their work"(Hatzios, Loriscy, 2008:242)

L'Etang and Pieczka, pointed out, "public relations education should be integrated and interdisciplinary". (L'Etang, Pieczka,2006:422)

In their national survey research DiStasoa, Stacks, Botanc founded that "judgments regarding the desired characteristics among job applicants and essential curriculum content were extremely similar between the practitioner and educator groups with both wanting more emphasis on research, ethics and strategic planning as the field moves from a low-paid technical emphasis toward a much better paid strategic planning and research emphasis" (DiStasoa, Stacks,Botanc , 2009:254).

Another moot point has been issues around "where public relations education should belong to?" Some practitioners and scholars consider public relations to be a business; they argue that it is a management function that should be taught as such, e.g., in a business school's management department. Grunig (1989) defines public relations as "the management of communication between an organization and its publics, although he does not advocate teaching it in a school of business. Anderson, maintains that public relations first-and-foremost is a management activity, not a communication function; rather, this top management activity affects the behavior of an organization. Also, a few full-time educators as well as practitioners who teach part-time have done so in schools of business' MBA programs. (Kruckeberg D. 1998: 242)

Ekachai and Komolsevin mentioned that the profession will become more highly internationally-oriented, it is agreed that future public relations practitioners should learn more about new and specialized media, and they should to be able to use technology well. Also the public relations students should know more than one language (Ekachai, Komolsevin, 1998:232)

Except from the question of "what public relations curriculum should contain", in public relations education literature there are several arguments about the questions of "what is the practitioners role in public relations education and what is the practitioners' view about public relations curriculum and assessment." PR associations see themselves as primary stakeholders in the training and education environment. (Rawel, 2002:71) For example, PR practitioners in the UK, through their professional association, have successfully obtained a degree of influence in higher education (Rawel,2002)

Certain issues frequently arise concerning practitioners' attitudes toward public relations education, namely: whether practitioners believe a well-rounded public relations curriculum must include a combination of theory, arts and science along with the writing and techniques courses; whether there is an agreement among practitioners as to the specific skills and education needed by the public relations graduate to successfully launch and develop a professional public relations career; how public relations professionals view the applicability of current university public relations education.(Cooper, 1979:3-4)

Public relations education is a topic of seemingly perpetual importance and interest for practitioners and educators alike. (Gibson, 1992-1993:45) Scott (1971) surveyed practitioners to determine what they wanted schools to teach recruits to the profession and largest percentage of respondents wanted to see all areas of business studies, writing skills. And in his research respondents complained about too much theory taught and lack of apply research. According to Peases's (1972) survey's results practitioners desired that writing and graphics art skill and knowledge about business and economics. Writing skills frequently has been mentioned that in public relations education. Educators and practitioners seem to agree that writing is a public relations curriculum fundamental. "Public relations practitioners lament expending significant resources to bring new hires up to par, blaming the academy for failing to teach students how to write. On the other hand, academics bemoan a lack of public relations teaching materials". (Hardin, Pompper, 2004:357) Public relations professionals have argued that educators neither provide students enough of what they need (Guiniven, 1998), nor do they spend enough time on writing (Eaton, 2000). Haberstroh (1995) published comments he received from 142 public relations counselors who agreed that writing skills of current public relations graduates are "a disaster area" (p. 22),

In spite of the fact that there are several research both practitioners and educators to determine sufficient curriculum, assessment methods and outcomes usually there is no consensus appeared to be developing to bring professionals and educators together on how best to meet the needs of students and practitioners. Newsom (1977) stated that, public relations educators and practitioners disagree about the priorities they assign to qualities and goals of public relations education. Practitioners and educators have been unduly timid in staking out their territory; they have allowed a historic uncertainty about the role and function of public relations to preclude attempts to better define and protect its parameters as a professional specialization requiring a prescribed educational curriculum. It's little wonder that scholars and practitioners do not enjoy consensus about its education. But Bateman and Cutlip advised that both educators and practitioners work to guide the art of public relations toward greater professionalism.

The onus is on public relations education not only to approach practitioners with ideas for closer links but also to consider ways of managing and developing the academic/ practitioner relationships. It is necessary to find solutions for some of the problems and difficulties such as ways of bridging the gap between academic and practitioner perspectives and also to find ways of dealing with the time-consuming nature of industrial liaison activities. (Anderson, 1999:35) For professionalism to be achieved in public relations, a commitment must be made by both practitioners and educators. To make the vision of [public relations professionalism] a reality, both practitioners and educators must make the decision that the profession of public relations requires specialized education" (Gruning, 1989:23)

When we consider all mentioned above about public relations education, public relations curriculum, assessment, required skills and the role of the practitioners in education it is obvious that finding out the mutual perceptions of educators and practitioners about public relations education is really important. Based on this idea the current research tries to reveal the views educators and practitioners about public relations education in Turkey.

The educational process typically is divided into four elements: determination of desired outcomes, development of curriculum to deliver those outcomes, use of pedagogy to provide instruction for the curriculum and assessment of student learning. Public relations educators have focused most of their attention on outcomes (skills and knowledge students need for the practice) and curriculum (packaging of those desired outcomes into courses). Lately, assessment has become a buzz word in public relations programs as higher education tries to quantify its contribution to society. (Coombs, Rybacki, 1999: 56) This research focun on desired and found outcomes, development of curriculum to deliver those outcomes, assessment of student learning.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this study is to determine how public relations educators and practitioners basically perceive public relations education as well as outlining the basic differences of thought between these two groups. At the same time, the study also intends to determine the qualities and skills educators and practitioners expect from entry-level and advance-level applicants, their thoughts on which candidates actually have such qualities and skills and compare accumulated information. Again, as an extension of the topic, various questions have been directed to determine activities expected from advance-level practitioners for promotion and self-improvement, skills demanding improvement and clarify the thoughts of the two study groups about which of these parameters are actually realised.

Another topic the study seeks to find answers is about public relations educators. The study intends to present a comparative perspective about not only the skills and duties educators and practitioners really expect from public relations educators, but also which qualities really exist in educators.

The study also intends to determine similarity and differences of thought between educators and practitioners about an important process in public relations education assessment technique and methods.

One of the significant objectives of the study is to present reciprocal opinions of educators and practitioners concerning public relations academic curriculum.

This study is based on the research paper titled "Perceptions of Public Relations Education" written by *Don W. Stacks, Carl Botan and Judy Van Slyke Turk* in 1999 that was published in the periodical *Public Relations Review*. Their questionnaire featured six categories: general perceptions, student abilities, student outcomes and learning, curricula, teaching practices, and demographics. However this study excludes teaching practices category. The questionnaire was sent online to 150 high-level practitioners with membership to the Turkish Public Relations Association as well as educators at universities offering public relations programmes. Results were analysed using the SPSS programme and a paired t test was applied to determine difference in opinion amongst the two groups.

### 4. RESULTS

#### ***Demographics Results***

The questionnaire was sent online to 150 high-level practitioners with membership to the Turkish Public Relations Association as well as 110 educators at universities offering public relations programmes. At the end of the period given, return of 86 online questionnaire from practitioners and 80 from educators. 65% of practitioners were female, %35 were male. %55 of educators were female, %45 were male. When educators' current positions were examined, approximately three fourths of the educators were assistant, associate or full professors; the other one fourth reported holding instructor or lecturer positions. When practitioners' current positions were examined, approximately half of the practitioners were advance-level director, the one fourth of practitioners were entry-level, the other one fourth were freelance.

#### ***General Perception of Public Relations***

In this section of research participants were asked to respond 10 likert-type statements about public relations. The data presented in table 1 indicate that perceptual distance between educator and practitioners. According to the t-test results there is a significant difference for 7 statements (statements 1-3-5-6-8-9-10) between educator and practitioners.

It is obvious that both educators and practitioners think that neither general public nor CEOs don't understand what is public relations sufficiently. Both groups had below the neutral perspective for these two statements.

Another remarkable result is about statement 8. This item has highest mean difference in table 1. For this statement educators rated higher score than practitioners. Practitioners rated below the neutral

perspective and it shows that public relations practitioners do not have positive attitudes toward PR college graduates. Also for statement 10 there is a perceptual gap between educators and practitioners. Practitioners rated 4.40 for statement 10. It was determined that public relations practitioners thought that college PR programs are too easy.

**Table 1: General Perceptions of Public Relations and Public Relations Education**

Statements	Educator				Practitioner	
	Mean	s.d	t	Sig.	Mean	s.d
1. Overall, the general public understands what public relations is.*	1.8	.88	-2.76	.008	2.4	1.2
2. Overall, most CEOs understand what public relations is.	2.2	.84	-0.09	.922	2.4	.69
3. Overall, most working journalists understand what public relations is.*	2.66	.89	-2.44	.016	3.08	.84
4. Public relations has greatly increased in sophistication (last 5-10 years).	4.34	.67	.043	.966	4.33	.81
5. PR education is keeping up with current trends in the profession.*	3.89	.891	3.09	.003	3.35	.86
6. The diversity of PR specialization is a barrier to a "standard" set of skills for PR career success.	2.52	1.16	-7.32	.800	2.65	1.14
7. As the PR profession becomes more established and appreciated, PR education will also.	3.31	.87	.11	.912	3.26	.81
8. Most PR practitioners have very positive attitudes toward PR college graduates.*	4.16	.72	11.64	.000	2.45	.94
9. Most PR practitioners respect college professors who teach PR.*	3.31	.96	6.06	.000	2.87	1.06
10. Most PR practitioners think college PR programs are too easy.*	2.82	.28	-8.43	.000	4.40	.516

\*p<.05

### **Public Relations Curriculum**

In this section of research participants were asked to evaluate 86 subjects (table 2) or topics that might be included public relation education on a scale ranging from 1(not essential) 7 (essential). These 86 items were divided 10 general areas. These areas are:

1. Origins and principles of public relations
2. The public relations field
3. Specializations
4. Public relations research
5. Public relations planning
6. Ethics and law
7. Public relations action-implementation
8. Public relations communication
9. Public relations performance evaluation
10. Public relations-related disciplines

To compare the mean of each group's self-perceptions about these 86 subjects, within-subject tests (paired sample t-test) were conducted. According to t-test results for 40 subjects educators and practitioners differed significantly. When we consider 10 areas, which were mentioned above, practitioner and educators do not have any significantly difference taught only in ethics and law area.

Firstly, in origins and principles of public relations area, about the item 2, both groups think differently. It is obvious that public relations educators consider history of public relations history more important than practitioners.(M of educators=5.90, M of practitioners=6.70; t=7.30, p=.000).

When we look at the public relations field area, items 5-6-7 and 8 have significantly different results. Practitioners found the "duties of PR practitioners" (item 5), more essential than educators. (M of

educators=6.10, M of practitioners=6.65; t=-9.06, p=.000) Just like item 5, about the “career-long professional development”(item 6), “the PR department” (item 7), “the PR counseling firm”(item8) practitioners have more positive thoughts than educators. This means practitioners believe more application oriented areas is necessary.

In specializations area, items 9-10-12 and 13 have significantly different results. All of these four items practitioners rated higher than educators. Public affairs/lobbying(M of educators=5.33, M of practitioners=5.80; t= -2.78, p=.000) publicity and media relations (M of educators=6.29, M of practitioners=6.90; t= -8.41, p=.000), International PR(M of educator=5.68, M of practitioners=6.46; t= -4.89, p=.000) .Financial/shareholder relations(M of educators=5.03, M of practitioners=6.15; t= -4.05, p=.000)

In PR research area participants were given 10 items and according to results educators and practitioners have significantly different views about seven items. (Item 17-20-21-22-23-24-26) Six of these different seven item practitioners rated greater than educators. It is clear that practitioners give more important applied research area than educators.

In PR planning area respondents were given 10 items. It is possible to say that there is general agreement in PR planning issues because educators and practitioners have similar views six items. In this section most remarkable results are item 35(M of educators=6.02, M of practitioners=6.90; t= -5.43, p=.000) and 36 (M of educators=5.66, M of practitioners=6.85; t= -6.27, p=.000). Item 35 represented crisis management knowledge and item 36 represented budgeting knowledge and both of these items were found more essential by practitioners than educators.

Educators and practitioners gave different views for two items (item 40-41) in PR Action/Implementation area. It means practitioners give more important individual activities in curriculum than educators.

In PR Communication area respondents were given 17 curriculum issues items and educators and practitioners gave significantly different responds to 7 items. Naturally educator rated Communication theory/concepts/models higher than practitioners. And also estimated as practitioners rated greater items layout/graphics , photography/film making producing and delivering audiovisual, electronic and multimedia communication to audiences, New PR tools and technologies than educators.

When we look at related courses areas while practitioners rated higher items; courses in journalism ,courses in photograph, courses in film-making, courses in marketing courses in management / organizational behavior, finance; educators rated greater items; courses in organizational communication, courses in political communication ,courses in general psychology, courses in general sociology, courses in general psychology, courses in general sociology.

**Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Public Relation Education Content Areas (curriculum)**

Item	Educator		Practitioner	
	Mean	s.d	Mean	s.d
<b>Origins and Principles of Public Relations</b>				
1.Nature and role of PR: Definitions	6.90	.99	6.70	.83
2.History of PR *	5.90	1.30	5.20	1.32
3.Societal forces affecting PR	6.05	.82	5.85	1.26
<b>The PR Field</b>				
4.Qualifications, education and training needed	6.05	1.04	6.10	.98
5.Duties of PR practitioners *	6.10	1.05	6.65	.80
6.Career-long professional development *	5.30	1.08	6.43	1.01
7.The PR department *	5.40	1.27	6.14	1.16
8.The PR counseling firm *	5.70	1.21	6.35	1.05

<b>PR Specializations</b>				
9.Public affairs/lobbying *	5.33	1.24	5.80	1.15
10.Publicity and media relations *	6.29	.97	6.90	.20
11.Fund-raising/membership development	5.05	1.41	5.15	1.23
12.International PR *	5.68	1.08	6.46	.96
13.Financial/shareholder relations *	5.03	1.16	6.15	1.18
14.Consumer relations	5.87	1.03	5.81	1.09
15.Community relations	6.05	.86	6.11	.96
16.Employee relations	6.16	.73	6.10	1.01
<b>PR Research</b>				
17.PR research designs/processes/techniques *	5.98	1.12	6.45	.90
18.Public opinion polling/surveys	6.02	.85	6.18	.82
19.Observation/performance measurement	5.86	1.38	5.93	1.23
20.Issue tracking *	5.88	1.19	6.37	1.02
21.Fact-finding/applied research *	5.93	1.17	6.35	.65
22.Historical research *	5.02	1.29	4.40	1.58
23.Media analysis/clipping analysis *	5.48	1.52	6.00	1.01
24.Focused interviews/focus groups *	5.55	1.32	6.16	.99
25.Social audits/communication audits/employee audits	5.20	1.20	5.12	1.41
26.Use of external research services/consultants *	5.38	1.07	6.35	1.08
<b>PR Planning</b>				
27.Problem/opportunity analysis	6.15	.89	6.07	.96
28.Organizational background/philosophy/culture *	5.77	1.32	6.34	.78
29.Setting goals/objectives/long-term/ * short-term/strategic planning	6.48	.92	6.92	.30
30.Assigning authority/responsibility	5.42	1.43	5.30	1.24
31.Timetables/calendaring	5.36	1.20	5.44	1.15
32.Planning theory/techniques/models	6.01	1.04	5.96	1.05
33.Audience segmentation/publics: general, media, employee, customer, stockholder, community, government, financial, special, etc.	6.65	.70	6.72	
34.Issues management				
35.Contingency/crisis/disaster planning *	6.02	1.16	6.90	.30
36.Budgeting *	5.66	1.22	6.85	.55
<b>Ethics and law</b>				
37.Credibility	6.38	.74	6.35	.86
38.Ethics, codes of practice: PR, media, business, law, accounting, medicine, government, etc.	6.45	1.20	6.32	.93
39.PR law/privacy/defamation/copyright/product liability/financial disclosure, etc	6.10	1.23	6.48	1.08
<b>PR Action/Implementation</b>				
40.Individual activities or actions of the client or employer organization *	5.48	1.02	6.27	1.05
41.Individual activities or actions of the PR practitioner/department/counseling firm *	5.75	.92	6.55	.85
42.Campaigns (as opposed to single activities)	6.32	1.38	6.35	.79
43.Continuing programs/product publicity/financial publicity/personnel/safety/suggestions	6.04	.94	5.98	1.45
44.Meetings/workshops/seminars/conventions/conferences/symposia, etc.	5.22	1.51	5.30	1.38
45.Other special events	5.11	1.17	5.27	1.20

46.One-time incidents/crisis/situations	5.70	1.26	6.00	1.32
<b>PR Communication</b>				
47.Communication theory/concepts/models *	6.75	.80	6.02	1.01
48.Persuasion	6.28	.78	6.21	.68
49.Propaganda	5.23	1.36	4.98	1.55
50.Message strategy	6.37	1.02	6.45	.58
51.Interpersonal communication	6.12	1.14	6.20	.89
52.Controlled (advertising) versus uncontrolled (publicity) communication	5.88	1.34	6.03	1.12
53.Planning, writing, producing and delivering print communication to audiences	6.55	.91	6.65	.83
54.Planning, writing, producing and delivering audiovisual, electronic and multimedia communication to audiences *	5.85	1.23	6.48	1.06
55.Employee/internal communication	6.30	.71	6.22	1.27
56.Layout/graphics *	5.51	1.37	6.11	1.18
57.Photography/Film making *	4.20	1.45	5.86	1.26
58.Feedback systems	5.98	1.11	5.86	1.33
59.Training spokespersons *	5.20	1.24	6.20	1.00
60.Speech -writing/speech-making *	5.35	1.14	6.44	.92
61.Working with outside suppliers	4.80	1.43	4.70	1.55
62.Corporate (graphic) identity	4.66	1.27	5.00	1.40
63.New PR tools and technologies: (e.g.satellite communication/teleconferencing/networking/E-mail/hypertext/webpage design-social networks *)	5.30	1.33	6.20	.76
<b>PR Performance Evaluation~Measurement</b>				
64.Setting performance/success criteria	6.12	1.15	6.05	1.00
65.Tools/methods of evaluation/measurement *	6.20	1.33	6.90	.71
66.Measuring program effectiveness	6.18	1.41	6.14	1.12
67.Measuring staff/PR counsel effectiveness	5.50	1.22	5.43	1.32
68.Reporting on results of PR efforts *	5.90	1.37	6.60	.75
69.Decision-making based on results (planning)	6.78	.78	6.60	.99
<b>Courses in PR-Related Disciplines</b>				
70.Courses in advertising	5.80	1.25	5.95	1.00
71.Courses in journalism *	5.73	1.32	6.47	.92
72.Courses in radio/TV/telecommunications	5.86	1.44	6.18	.83
73.Courses in mass communication law *	5.05	1.52	4.40	1.32
74.Courses in photography *	4.10	1.21	5.78	1.16
75.Courses in film-making *	3.36	1.37	4.65	1.49
76.Courses in art/design/graphics	4.60	1.45	4.87	1.27
77.Courses in hypertext/web design	5.10	1.34	5.41	1.29
78.Courses in information technologies	5.43	1.20	5.60	1.03
79.Courses in organizational communication *	6.02	.94	5.70	1.10
80.Courses in political communication *	5.65	1.11	5.00	1.28
81.Courses in general psychology *	5.89	1.10	5.20	1.50
82.Courses in general sociology *	5.94	1.25	5.26	1.29
83.Courses in marketing *	5.70	1.18	6.58	1.18
84.Courses in management / organizational behavior*	5.80	1.26	6.46	.81
85.Courses in finance *	4.62	.80	5.48	1.09
86.Many qualified public relations students participate in internship/practicum/	6.55	.96	6.62	.70



work-study programs of various types, typically under the supervision of an experienced public relations practitioner. Please evaluate the importance of this experience.				
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Note: Item in bold represent factors

\*p<.05

### General Assessment Techniques

In this part of current research respondents were asked a series of questions regarding assessment techniques and evaluation in public relation education.

Respondents were given 9 likert-type statements to determine attitude toward assessment techniques. The data presented in table, 3 indicates that perceptual distance between educator and practitioners. According to the t-test results there is a significant difference for 4 statements (statements 3-6-7-8) between educator and practitioners. Among the statistically different statements especially two statements are interesting (statements 7 and 8). The statements 7 propounds that "each public relations major should undergo a portfolio assessment prior to graduation". Public relations practitioners rated this statement higher than educators. (M of educator=3.40, M of practitioners=4.70; t=-3.70, p= .000). This means, practitioners consider portfolio significant more than educators. And the statement 8 suggests that "an assessment program should include area professionals". Like statement 7 public relations practitioners rated this statement higher than educators. . (M of educator=3.00, M of practitioners=4.40; t=-4.77, p= .000). This means educators and practitioners think different about this assessment technique and practitioners believe that assessment programs should comprise professionals' assessments too.

**Table 3: Means, Standard Deviations and t-test Results Attitude toward Assessment Techniques**

Statements	Educator		t	Sig.	Practitioner	
	Mean	s.d			Mean	s.d
1.Public relations programs should systematically asses students outcomes	4.4	.80	2.26	.550	4.2	.80
2.Assessment should be an <i>informal</i> part of all public relations students' education.*	3.6	1.2	0.50	.805	3.2	.89
3.Student assessment should evaluate specific outcomes, specified in advance.*	3.5	.90	-2.04	<b>.036</b>	3.7	.70
4.Assessment should focus only on mastering specific skills related to first job public relations activities and techniques.	2.0	1.3	0.04	.755	2.2	1.1
5.Public relations education should be assessed only in classroom activities.	2.1	.80	0.91	.800	2.0	.75
6.Assessment activities should be used only to evaluate educational program strengths and weaknesses.*	2.5	1.1	1.84	<b>.000</b>	2.2	.92
7. Each public relations major should undergo a "portfolio" assessment prior to graduation.*	3.4	.96	-3.70	<b>.000</b>	4.7	1.0
8. An assessment program should include area professionals.*	3.0	.60	-4.77	<b>.000</b>	4.4	.73
9. Student assessment should be conducted individually on an annual basis	3.31	.96	6.06	<b>.000</b>	2.87	1.06

### Outcomes

Respondents were asked to evaluate public relations students should be able to do on the job and what respondents actually observed at four different levels experience. Evaluation of skills, attitudes and content areas was on a 1(not desired) to 7 (highly desired) continuums. In addition, respondents were asked to

evaluate each item as to desirability and then as to the degree to which it was found in the field. After then, respondents were asked to rank the top items required for hiring and the items that presented the greatest problem in hiring entry-level and advance-level positions.

To analyze the data three different analyses used.

1. Descriptive analyses were conducted on the mean scores for each desired and found item
2. Two principal component factor analyses were run with varimax rotation.
3. The ranking for hiring and hiring problems were examined.

### **Entry-level Outcomes**

To determine the entry-level applicants' "desire" and "found" factors 102 skills and content area were given to the participants. From among 102 items the descriptive analysis revealed that 18 item of the "desired skills" which were rated 6.0 or higher by both educators and practitioners. (table 4) To bring to light "found skills" certain statements were chosen which were rated 5.0 or higher by both educators and practitioners. According to this analysis results five "found items" were rated 5.0 or higher. The two factor analyses yielded two different sets of factors. (table 5)

When asked top ranked hiring skills, interpersonal skills, understand business practice, media relations knowledge and writing/presentation skills were chosen by both groups. On the other hand top ranked hiring problems were understanding business practice, problem solving skills, writing skills, strategic thinking skills.

According to results, as you can see table 4, educators and practitioners desired sophisticated applicants for entry-level position. When we consider both groups answers together it is obvious that to be success for entry-level position applicants have to knowledgeable about media relations, writing skills, current events, persuasion, presentation skills, social trends, business trends and strategic thinking. And also educators and practitioners think that applicants have to be creative, curious, self-starter and analytic. Although both educators and practitioners desire these 18 item, the results shows that only 5 items were "found" for entry-level applicants.(table 4) To sum up it is possible to say that there is a huge gap between "desired and found" items for entry-level applicants.

**Table 4: Means Standard Deviations: Entry-Level Public Relations Applicant**

Item (desired)	Educator		Practitioner	
	Mean	s.d	Mean	s.d
Media relations knowledge	6.77	.73	6.50	.80
Demonstrates strategic thinking *	6.26	1.1	6.82	.66
Interpersonal skills	6.20	.95	6.55	.70
Knowledge/interest in current events	6.12	1.2	6.57	.78
Creative and imaginative*	6.00	1.8	6.45	1.1
Understand business practice *	6.22	.61	6.77	.50
Writing newsletter	6.00	1.3	6.47	.55
Analytical skills	6.26	.92	6.39	.95
Persuasive ability	6.16	.82	6.11	.61
Problem solving skills*	6.10	1.4	6.65	.55
Self-starter	6.15	.93	6.26	.85
Good resume and references	6.33	.75	6.00	1.3
Foreign language	6.10	1.2	6.40	.62
Internet knowledge	6.05	.84	6.15	.78
Awareness of social trends	6.00	1.2	6.20	.90
Writing reports and memorandum	6.28	.82	6.00	1.2
Curiosity	6.15	1.1	6.30	.65
Networking	6.03	1.1	6.10	.78
Items (found)	Educators		Practitioners	
Internet knowledge	6.20	.82	6.10	.90
Good attitude	5.20	1.3	5.40	.75
Awareness of social trends	6.50	.70	5.50	1.2
Pr activities in college	6.60	.55	6.00	1.0
Foreign language	5.50	1.3	5.90	1.1

\*p<.05

**Table 5: Rotated Factor Matrix: Entry-Level Skills**

Desired Factors	Found Factors
Media relations knowledge	Internet knowledge
Strategic business thinking	Good resume and references
Understand business practices	Awareness of social trends
Problem solving skills	Foreign language
Creative and imaginative	Interpersonal skills
Writing skills	Ability to communicate publicly
Data analysis and reporting	
Research/Statistics	
Passion to work	
General Education and Interest	

**Advance-Level Outcomes**

To determine the advance-level applicants' "desire" and "found" factors 16 skills and content areas were given to the participants. From among 16 items the descriptive analysis revealed that 9 items of the desired skills which were rated 6.0 or higher by both educators and practitioners. (table 6) To bring to light "found" skills certain statements were chosen which were rated 5.0 or higher by both educators and practitioners. According to this analysis results three "found items" were rated 5.0 or higher. (table 6) The two factor analyses yielded two different sets of factors. (table 7) When asked top ranked hiring skills, field experience in public relations, leadership skills, knowledge about different public relations techniques. On the other hand top ranked hiring problems were research skills, understand business practices in different sectors.

**Table 6: Means and Standard Deviations: Advanced-Level Public Relations Practitioners**

Item (desired)	Educator		Practitioner	
	Mean	s.d	Mean	s.d
Field experience	6.32	.50	6.50	.70
Passion to work	6.00	1.2	6.40	.60
Networking	6.80	.98	6.90	.70
Strategic thinking and planning	6.22	.75	6.58	.77
Leadership skills	6.00	.80	6.45	1.1
Understand business practice	6.77	.51	6.80	.50
Research skills	6.00	1.3	6.55	.55
Knowledge in crisis communication	6.26	.92	6.39	.95
Knowledge and experience in media relations	6.40	.82	6.90	.61
Items (found)	Educators		Practitioners	
Field experience	6.80	.80	6.90	.50
Knowledge and experience in media relations	6.80	1.1	6.85	.75
Networking	6.50	.75	6.40	1.1

\*p<.05

**Table 7: Rotated Factor Matrix: Advance-Level Skills**

Desired Factor	Found Factor
Research Skills	Field experience
Problem-solving skills	Professional Association Activity
Field experience	Networking
Crisis communication and management	Works well in a team effort
Handles the Media Professionally	

**Advance-Level, Continuing Education and Public Relations Educators Outcomes**

This part of research tried to reveal certain activities or skills which required promotion and continuing education for advance level practitioners. Respondents were asked to evaluate 9 items representing activities and skills practiced by advance practitioners. Of the nine items only 3 items were rated 6.00 or higher as “desired items” and respondents ranked one “found item” at 6.00 or higher.

**Table 8: Means and Standard Deviations: Advanced-Level, Continuing Education**

Item (desired)	Educator		Practitioner	
	Mean	s.d	Mean	s.d
Attends professional development courses	6.40	.65	6.50	.80
Presenting at professional conferences	6.00	.76	6.00	.60
Leadership in organization	6.30	.90	6.90	.52
Items (found)	Educators		Practitioners	
Attends professional development courses	6.20	1.3	6.90	.65

Respondents also rated items relating to public relations educator. They were given 12 items about public relations educators and they rated 5 desired items among them. On the other hand they rated two items as found item at 6.00 or greater. (table 9)

**Table 9: Means and Standard Deviations Public Relations Educator**

Item (desired)	Educator		Practitioner	
	Mean	s.d	Mean	s.d
Understands role of public relations in different sectors*	6.00	1.4	6.90	.70
Uses theory in teaching *	6.60	.76	6.00	1.3
Advance research knowledge*	6.30	1.2	6.90	.50
Disseminating research results and using these in classroom*	6.40	.90	6.70	.55
Teaches ethics and value about public relations	6.66	.78	6.10	.65
Items (found)	Educators		Practitioners	
Uses theory in teaching	6.60	.90	6.20	.55
Teaches ethics and value about public relations	6.50	1.12	6.05	.89

\*p<.05

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this survey help to answer the question of whether educators and practitioners are "on the same page" regarding public relations education.

Looking at the first section of the study titled "general perceptions of public relations" it is hard to say that there is a general agreement amongst educators and practitioners. T-test results indicate a significant difference in opinion between the two groups over 6 of the 10 questions in this section. Both groups are in agreement concerning some general issues like CEO's lacking a clear picture on what public relations really mean or that public relations has become more sophisticated over the past decade. However there is disagreement concerning how general public and journalists perceive public relations. Although there is a statistical difference in this part of the survey, the important thing is that both groups consistently returned a low percentage of opinions concerning whether the general public, CEO's and journalists knew what public relations mean. In other words despite the difference in opinion both groups think that the three categories do not really know what public relations really mean. Meanwhile it is thought provoking to know that public relations practitioners have only returned above average response to respecting public relations educators and that they think public relations education is very easy.

It would be accurate to say a significant difference in opinion persists amongst educators and practitioners concerning what should be included and excluded from the academic curriculum for public relations. Looking at the response related to academic curriculum we can see a disagreement between the groups on almost half of the issues. The first of the striking differences is concerning "PR Field". Looking at the responses in this section we can see that, compared to educators, practitioners returned relatively more positive feedback on the necessity of practical matters being included in the curriculum such as duties of PR practitioners, career-long professional development, PR department and PR counselling firm

Similarly, in the section on PR specialisations within the academic curriculum. practitioners considered subjects like international PR, financial/shareholder relations more important than educators. Mean differences for both these areas are high. Hence, it is possible to say that, drawing from professional experience, practitioners are trying to express the significance of international PR in scope of contemporary public relations education. Practitioners have a similar opinion about shareholder relations. Parallel to suggestions it is maybe possible for educators to make improvements to the curriculum in this context.

Looking at the section on PR Research in scope of the public relations curriculum once again one can notice a statistically significant difference in opinions on several issues. Except historical research, the percentage of practitioners expressing a necessity was higher than educators in a majority of areas returning significant difference. Meanwhile, practitioners also expressed the need for incorporating the topic of external research services/consultants into current public relations curriculum. Educators on the other hand considered the topic of historical research to be more important. Looking at PR Planning it would be accurate to say that both groups expressed similar opinions in scope of the academic curriculum. One of the most interesting parts in this section is budgeting. As data suggests, compared to educators, practitioners give much more importance

to the existence of budgeting in scope of the current academic curriculum. We come across another difference of opinion in the section on PR Action/Implementation regarding the necessity having practical aspects of public relations as a profession. Practitioners considered the need for incorporating critical subjects in respect to the execution process such as individual activities or actions of the client or employer organization, individual activities or actions of the PR practitioner/department/counselling firm into the current academic curriculum, returning relatively higher positive opinions compared to educators.

Looking at the section on PR Communication in scope of the public relations curriculum we see that educators consider the area of communication theory/concepts/models to be very necessary and in this sense differ from practitioners. However, the differences in opinion in this section other than communication theory/concepts/models suggest that practitioners consider certain subjects to be more significant. It is apparent that practitioners responded more positively to areas like planning, writing, producing and delivering audiovisual, electronic and multimedia communication to audiences, layout/graphics, photography/film making, training spokespersons, speech -writing/speech-making. Similar to other sections on the curriculum the main requirement lies in the area of professional practice of public relations. In this context a special note is required for the the topics of training spokespersons, speech -writing/speech-making because contemporary public relations practices increasingly demand the public relations specialist being well-trained and capable of effective, correct and target oriented written - verbal communications skills. This is especially true in the times we live in where crisis communication activities gain ever more importance. Public relations specialists responsible of crisis communication are expected to deliver declarations/announcements making it imperative for people in this position to be well educated and capable of effective written-verbal communication in addition to being an effective tutor. Both groups agree on how important these two topics are in context of educating the contemporary public relations specialist making this a point to consider.

Looking at the section on PR Performance Evaluation-Measurement once again we see that practitioners consider issues of tools/methods of evaluation/measurement, reporting on results of PR efforts to be more significant. Meanwhile, educators and practitioners returned statistically significant difference on many issues concerning the topic of courses in related disciplines

Looking at areas considered to be more fundamental for practitioners rather than educators once again we predominantly see business management and execution oriented practical subjects like courses in journalism, courses in photography, courses in film-making, courses in management / organizational behavior, courses in finance and courses in marketing. In contrast, educators find areas that widen students' intellectual perspective such as courses in mass communication law, .courses in organizational communication, courses in political communication, courses in general psychology and courses in general sociology

Drawing a general assessment on academic curriculum it would be accurate to say that educators and practitioners have different opinions about the matter stemming from their own occupational roles. Practitioners generally gave answers in scope of the process they witness at the office and, compared to educators, considered academic courses focusing on developing practical skills to be more important for the student. Educators on the other hand considered the hypothetical and theoretical aspect of public relations education supported by courses focusing on developing intellectual perspective to be more significant. However, regardless of the prevailing difference in opinion mentioned above, one point of significance is that neither do educators disregard practical issues nor do practitioners ignore the theoretical aspects aiming at developing intellectual perspective, returning above average answers. The results have been considered as an indicator that both sides are getting closer to the point of meeting "on the same page".

We come across an interesting result when comparing opinions of educator and practitioner regarding the assessment. Practitioners had the opinion that practitioners themselves should have a say in assessing the education process. The percentage return for this opinion was very high. However it is impossible to mention of a statistical difference between educators and practitioners regarding this issue. Compared to practitioners, educators are much more against this idea. This issue proclaims that giving a role to practitioners in assessing education output could be opened to debate. Another striking result is concerning whether assessment should incorporate a portfolio evaluation. In this context practitioners expressed high ratio of agreement to the necessity of a portfolio evaluation. Similar to the assessment of academic curriculum this indicates that practitioners give more importance to practical oriented processes compared to educators.

It is possible to say that there is general agreement between the two groups concerning the basic skills expected from entry-level public relations applicants. However practitioners consider characteristics like demonstrating strategic thinking, creativity and imagination, understanding of business practice and problem solving skills to be more important compared to educators. Looking closely we see that these areas receiving relatively more response from practitioners are clearly more related to business processes and practice. A matter of further interest is that the majority of characteristics listed by both groups under “desired factors” have not been identified as “found factors”. This could be evidence of a predicament in the system because the absence of “desired skills and areas” agreed by both educators and practitioners amongst entry-level applicants could be an indicator of a problem in the educational system. This is why additional research is required to determine where this problem stems from. There is a general agreement in respect to advance-level public relations practitioners with no mentionable difference between the two groups.

Probably one of the most interesting outcomes of the study is the assessment on public relations educators. Accumulated data suggests that both groups responded to 5 characteristics for educators as “desired factors” with high points however, only 2 were considered to be “found factors”. At this point it must be underlined that the low number of “found factors” amongst educators can be explained by the joint assessment of both groups and the necessity of receiving 5 or greater votes from both groups for a characteristic to be considered a found factor. With the exception of these two areas practitioners gave less than 5 points. This result is significant because it clearly demonstrates practitioners belief that educators lack desired factors like understanding role of public relations in different sectors, advance research knowledge, disseminating research results and using these in classroom.

In summary it is possible to say that there are some basic differences in opinion concerning public relations education between the educator and practitioner, the two most significant elements in the profession of public relations. It is fundamental that educators and practitioners understand each other, determine needs and cooperate closely so that the profession can continue a healthy development, increase quality of education and educate workforce to be capable of meeting the demands of the industry. This is imperative because basing public relations education solely on theory or practice will inhibit the healthy development of the discipline. This is why, in scope of study results, it is critical to thoroughly look into the opinions of both groups in order to determine the source of difference in opinion and expectations amongst educators and practitioners and create a healthy balance in education between theory and practice.

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