

Fall 12-1-2020

## **Public Relations Education in Mississippi Today: Perceptions and Realities**

Gail Brown

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Brown, Gail, "Public Relations Education in Mississippi Today: Perceptions and Realities" (2020).  
*Dissertations*. 1848.  
<https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/1848>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact [Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu](mailto:Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu).

PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION IN MISSISSIPPI TODAY:  
PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES

by

Gail Hargrove Marshall Brown

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School,  
the College of Arts and Sciences  
and the School of Communication  
at The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved by:

Fei Xue, Ph.D., Committee Chair  
Christopher Campbell, Ph.D.  
Jae-Hwa Shin, Ph.D., MPH  
Vanessa Murphree, Ph.D.  
Cheryl D. Jenkins, Ph.D.

December 2020

COPYRIGHT BY

Gail Hargrove Marshall Brown

2020

*Published by the Graduate School*



## ABSTRACT

This two-component study assessed public relations educators' (n=18) and public relations practitioners' (n=53) perceptions and realities of public relations education in Mississippi today. A Qualtrics-designed survey ascertained the quantitative data for Study I (N=71). The researcher used telephone and email interviews to gather qualitative data from a convenience sample (N=10) of five public relations practitioners and five public relations educators for Study II. The dual study used education recommendations from the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) 2017 Report, *Fast Forward: Foundations and Future State. Educators and Practitioners*, as assessment variables.

The survey was distributed to the Public Relations Association of Mississippi (PRAM) members via its newsletter and other Mississippi public relations educators and practitioners via email. The overall findings indicated, from an Analysis of variance (ANOVA), that there were significant differences between the practitioners and educators in six of the reality (actuality) assessment areas. They were stronger and effective writing, ensuring diversity in student/educator based, diversity and inclusion in teaching, ethics, enhanced technology KSAs on the part of the educator, and actual enough hands-on practices. The study found no significant differences in perceptions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank God for making this achievement possible. I am deeply grateful to my very supportive family and friends for their love and understanding.

I express special thanks to my pastor, Reverend Dr. Audrey Lynne Hall, a proud “TTT” USM alumnae; to my Holy Temple Missionary Baptist Church family; and my Aunt Monzola Ross, aka “Tee Tee,” for their prayers and encouragements to persevere.

To my Marshall, Hargrove, Randle, and Brown families, your prayers and well-wishes have genuinely played an essential part in helping to keep me moving forward.

I am most appreciative to my divinely chosen dissertation committee for their stellar guidance, patience, time, and investment in me. My Committee Chair, Professor Fei Xue, Ph.D., aka “Dr. X’s,” scholarly mentorship, direction, and understanding have been a phenomenon. He is a gentle giant “with the patience of Job.” Despite all challenges I faced, neither you nor the committee gave up on me. Special thanks also to Dr. Christopher Campbell for serving as my department director, professor, and advisor during this extensive journey.

I am grateful to my childhood friends and classmates, Monzell Brooks Randle and Minister Gwendolyn P. Davis, for their supportive and spiritual messages. Thanks to everyone who helped me in any way to achieve this significant milestone in life.

I also acknowledge Mrs. Beulah F. Greer, my Executive Director, and my late colleague and friend, Ms. Lula M. Friar, for their prayers, understanding, and encouragement to help me complete this endeavor.

## DEDICATION

I honor my husband, Edison Thomas Brown, Jr., and our son, Edison Thomas Brown, III, a proud University of Southern Mississippi (USM) Music Education major, on his way “To The Top (TTT),” with this academic research. It has been challenging but a labor of love for an academic discipline that I view as an agent of positive societal changes. I thank God for their love, support, and sacrifice.

This dissertation is also dedicated to the memories of my loving and nurturing maternal grandparents, James and Beatrice Marshall; my quiet, sweet mother, Mary Ann Marshall; and my encouraging father, US Army SP7 Retired Korea and Vietnam veteran Howard Herman Hargrove. I also dedicated this dissertation to the memories of my first Cousin Herman Earl Plummer, Jr., who was like a brother to me; my dear stepmother Josephine C. Hargrove; and my loving in-laws, Edison and Ednora Randle-Brown. Each of whom had a positive impact on my life.

Therefore, I honor their memories with my academic work for the following, but not limited to, reasons: my late grandparents for their Christian values, strong parental love, and many sacrifices; my mother for always wanting to hold my hand; my cousin-brother Herman aka “Champ” for being there for me, despite his life challenges; my stepmother for lovingly welcoming me into her heart as her only child and never viewing me as a stepdaughter but a daughter; to my father for urging me not to give up on pursuing my Ph.D. and for providing a needed financial boost to get me started; and my in-laws for always loving and treating me as one of their biological children

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
DEDICATION .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	viii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS .....	ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	x
CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	7
CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	9
Pedagogy’s Origin and Approaches .....	10
Professional Pedagogical Programs .....	12
The State of Public Relations Education .....	16
More Writing Needed .....	17
Global Vision .....	17
Linking theory to practice .....	19
Ethics .....	23
Crisis Management .....	25
Technology .....	26

Why A Study on Mississippi PR Education? .....	26
Research Questions and Rationales .....	28
CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY .....	30
Study I – The Survey .....	30
Research Design.....	30
Population/Participants .....	32
Sample and Procedures .....	32
Measurements .....	34
Study II – The Interview .....	35
Research Design.....	35
Participants.....	35
Procedures/Data Collection Process .....	36
Instrument .....	37
Data Analysis .....	38
CHAPTER IV – RESULTS.....	40
Study I – The Survey .....	40
Survey respondent profile .....	40
Analysis of Research Questions.....	45
PR practitioners: Perception .....	45
PR practitioners: Reality .....	50



PR Educator: Perception .....	54
PR Educator: Reality.....	58
Differences Between Practitioners and Educators .....	61
Study II.....	65
CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION.....	73
Study I and Study II .....	73
Summary of Key Findings .....	73
Interpretation of Results.....	75
Writing .....	78
Diversity, D&I, and Ethics.....	78
Enhanced Technology KSAs .....	81
Hands-on .....	82
Implications of Study I and Study II.....	82
Limitations .....	83
Conclusion and Recommendations.....	83
APPENDIX A – Cover Letter and Survey.....	85
APPENDIX B – IRB Approval Letters .....	103
APPENDIX C – Interview Protocol/Consent for Study II.....	105
APPENDIX D – A List of PR Courses in Mississippi .....	111
REFERENCES .....	113

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 1</b> Participant by Category .....	41
<b>Table 2.1</b> Age of Respondents .....	42
<b>Table 2.2</b> Race of Respondents .....	43
<b>Table 2.3</b> Education Level Completed .....	44
<b>Table 2.4</b> Years of Public Relations Experience .....	45
<b>Table 3</b> Descriptive of Perception (Practitioners) .....	47
<b>Table 4</b> Descriptive of Reality (Practitioners).....	51
<b>Table 5</b> Descriptive of Perception (PR Educators) .....	55
<b>Table 6</b> Descriptive of Reality (PR Educators).....	58
<b>Table 7.1</b> Actually, diverse Student and Faculty Base.....	62
<b>Table 7.2</b> Actually, changes in teaching diversity .....	62
<b>Table 7.3</b> Actually, teach strong and effective writing .....	63
<b>Table 7.4</b> Actually, teach enough ethics .....	63
<b>Table 7.5</b> Actually, enhance own technology skills.....	63
<b>Table 7.6</b> Enough hands-on.....	64
<b>Table 8</b> MS PR Education Strengths.....	66
<b>Table 9</b> MS PR Education Weaknesses .....	68
<b>Table 10</b> Reasons More Writing, D&I, and Ethics Are Need in MS PR Education.....	71

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. The Wheel of PR Education .....	21
Figure 2. Gender for Respondents .....	43

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AEJ</i>	Association for Education in Journalism
<i>AEJMC</i>	Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
<i>ANOVA</i>	Analysis of Variance
<i>ASJMC</i>	Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication
<i>CPRE</i>	Commission on Public Relations Educations
<i>EBP</i>	Evidence-Based Practice
<i>IDTs</i>	Instructional Delivery Techniques
<i>IPRA</i>	International Public Relations Association
<i>M</i>	<i>Means</i>
<i>N</i>	The number of “usable” respondents
<i>PI</i>	Principle Investigator
<i>PR</i>	Public Relations
<i>PRAM</i>	Public Relations Association of Mississippi
<i>PRSA</i>	Public Relations Society of America
<i>SPRF</i>	Southern Public Relations Federation
<i>SD</i>	Standard deviation
<i>SPSS</i>	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
<i>Tas</i>	Teaching Assistants
<i>T-test</i>	T-Test
<i>USM</i>	The University of Southern Mississippi

## CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Practical, up-to-date public relations education is essential to producing effective, highly knowledgeable, trained, and skilled public relations practitioners, especially in today's rapidly changing, technological society. How are today's educators and practitioners assessing their preparation for the public relations profession? What is needed educationally and skill-wise, and what is not? These are questions that have been posed throughout the years as public relations evolved as a recognized discipline of study. Such educational concerns also mirror the history of public relations itself.

Historically, it is essential to note that the first public relations course was taught by the acclaimed father of public relations, Edward L. Bernays, in 1923 at New York University. He possibly sparked the long and historical debate about public relations education and its place in academia by those who were critical of its acceptance as a profession. A press agent and public relations consultant, Bernays "applied psychology in public persuasion campaigns. He developed the concept of public relations as 'the engineering of consent,' which he called 'the very essence of the democratic process, the freedom to persuade or suggest'" (Buffalostate.edu, 2011).

Influenced greatly in his public relations ideas and concepts by his uncle and professor, Sigmund Freud, Bernays defended education in his book, *Propaganda*: "The public is not cognizant of the real value of education and does not realize that education, as a social force, is not receiving the kind of attention it has the right to expect in a democracy" (Bernays, 1928, 2004).

Initially, and for many years after the beginning of Bernays' course, public relations education certainly did not receive the kind of attention it deserved. This is

indicated by the slow process of public relations education, developing as an academic study area. There was still some national debate about its definition and acceptance as one of the mass communications disciplines. It was not until 1947 that Boston University offered a program of study in public relations. Following that, it was not until the 1960s and 1970's that a "sizable number of colleges followed suit" (Turney, 2008).

As public relations evolved into an academic discipline and was no longer only viewed as a "vocation" (Cutlip, 1994) or occupation, like all educational programs, specific guidelines, needed courses of study, best practices, and quality assurance, and endorsements had to be established and met. These needs gave rise to establishing the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE), "an independent body of public relations educators and practitioners representing 15 professional societies in public relations and related fields of communications. Founded in 1973 by the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism (AEJ), now AEJMC (Association of Journalism and Mass Communications) and co-sponsored by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), CPRE has presented research-based recommendations via a myriad of reports on public relations education worldwide since its inception. Colleges and universities throughout the world have adopted these recommendations—enhancing the relevance and quality of public relations education" (CPRE, Industry-Educator Summit on PR: Summary Report, May 12, 2015).

CPRE's 2017 undergraduate education report is titled *Fast Forward: Foundations and Future State. Educators and Practitioners*. Published in April 2018, the report delineated a fast-forwarding progression of public relations education's achievements and concerns from various periods of its existence as an academic discipline. The report

revealed some alarming problems similar to the circumstances that industry legends Carroll Bateman and Professor and Author Scott M. Cutlip raised in their paper to the PR Division of AEJ back in 1973. Their report focused on the “unsatisfactory and disparate state of public relations education in the US.” (Batman and Cutlip, 1973) in (CPRE, 2017). Therefore, how satisfactory and what is the state of current, technological-aged public relations education?

### *Statement of the Problem*

An immediate response to the question mentioned above and based on findings of CPRE’s 2107 reports, there is research-based evidence that public relations education still has some issues of concern. A summary of those findings presented later in this section paints a picture of the academic discipline’s current assessments.

However, keynote speaker Rob Flaherty, President and CEO of Ketchum, forewarned about the future state of public relations during the 2015 CPRE Industry-Educator Summit, in which 50 public relations industry leaders and educators met.

Flaherty alerted the leaders and educators then of the following concerns:

- Half of everything needed now did not exist ten years ago.
- People under the age of 35 know more about how people communicate, share information, and form opinions than people older than 35.
- Some core skills still apply, but the context is very, very different.
- The past few years’ changes shape the foundation of skills taught for decades (CPRE, 2015).

The summit's second keynote speaker Elizabeth Toth, Ph.D., Professor and Chair, Department of Communication, University of Maryland, emphasized the following public relations education observations and concerns:

- Industry leaders and educators have much in common and share great enthusiasm. “We are not ‘Mars and Venus,’ but have shared goals – developing talented people for our profession – and shared concerns – the profession is changing so quickly, it’s difficult for all of us to keep up,” Toth stated.
- Undergraduate public relations education is not day-after-day in the public relations classroom.
- Students spend two-thirds of their time studying liberal arts and related courses (CPRE, 2015).

Both speakers (the PR practitioner and PR educator) raised some thought-provoking points about the industry and the education needed to effectively prepare public relations practitioners to excel in their profession.

Fast forward just two years later (2017), the CPRE, “the authoritative voice” on behalf of public relations education, released some crucial, critical findings of public relations education. The CRPE 2017 Report published the following results or recommendations in the Spring, 2018:

1. CPRE continues to endorse “the five-core courses” first recommended in 2006, and it suggests the addition of the sixth course in ethics:

- Introduction to public relations (including; theory, origin, and principles)
- Public relations research, measurement, and evaluation



- Public relations writing and production
- Supervised work experience in public relations (internship)
- An additional public relations course in law and ethics, planning and management, case studies, or campaigns (a standard that has evolved in actual practice to focus primarily on case studies and campaigns).

2. PR majors must have a liberal arts education, write exceptionally well, recognize the importance of theory in practice, participate in paid internships after having taken enough pre-requisites;

3. The industry, practitioners, and educators must continue a dialogue among themselves regarding public relations education;

4. All faculty must be prepared to teach effectively and to have experience or at least be exposed to the practice of public relations;

5. Educators and administrators must ensure diversity in the public relations profession by teaching and including it in the educational process.

6. The Commission must take a leadership role in enhancing the perceived value of a degree in public relations and supporting the industry and academic association efforts to strengthen public relations practitioners' position and value to society.

7. The Commission must help educators enhance the presence and value of public relations programs and departments within universities and work with practitioners and industry associations to support these efforts.

8. With the growth of online delivery of public relations education, educators and stakeholders must pay attention to specialized pedagogical training for online teaching.

9. Since Technology and digital media do not “standstill,” educators and practitioners must stay current on emerging communication tools and platforms... and

10. There is a need for more global education to ensure that students learn that public relations practice differs throughout the world.

While all the CPRE 2017 recommendations are critical to any follow-up or replicated research on the matters, Numbers 2, 4, 5, 8, and 9 resonated more among the participants in this investigation’s qualitative component. Global learning for the Mississippi study received some commentary as well. However, domestically in America and in various geographical cultures, students need, even at the secondary level, exposure to the concepts, opportunities, and the rudiments of public relations.

As indicated in Recommendations 5, 6, and 7, the Commission, educators, and administrators must play critical leadership roles in public relations diversity, enhancing the present value of public relations degrees and programs within our universities. One might be surprised to know that, in this day and time, public relations as a concept still has some identity issues and, in particular, in Mississippi. During this study, a high school graduate inquired of the principal investigator (PI) whether a major in communication was the same as a major in public relations.

Nevertheless, despite its lack of awareness, especially in rural communities and possibly other geographical areas, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, public relations specialist occupations are on the rise, projected to grow six percent from 2018 to 2028 (BSL 2018). May 2018 statistics for Mississippi presented 1,430 public relations specialists’ employment compared to 270,000 in the United States for that reporting period.

Therefore, based on the needed recommendations of the Commission on Public Relations Education 2017 Report and the projected increase in public relations job forecast for 2028, it was essential to assess public relations education's availability and up-to-date trends in all geographical and diverse cultural areas, large or small; rural or urban, including a southern state such as Mississippi. This assessment of public relations education in the "hospitality state" aimed to increase public relations awareness and enhance the value of a degree in the field. Such an assessment can ultimately help prepare students to become effective and productive practitioners in the industry's rapidly changing scope of services.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of the study was to specifically look at public relations education in the Southern state of Mississippi and assess it via PR educators' and PR practitioners' views (their perceptions and realities) based on the nationally and internationally recommendations of the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) 2017 Report as a foundational framework. It is critical to pause and set some definitions here for the two somewhat opposing impressions (perception and realities) used to assess conceptualization purposes.

Perception is "a subjective, active, and creative process in which we interpret what we sense by assigning meaning to sensory information through which we understand ourselves and others. Several variables influence our perception of environmental variables, our motivations, our past experiences, culture, and daily experiences" (How Environmental Variables & Other Factors Influence Perception,

2015). In essence, it is what “we think” based on what we experience or practice (past or present) as well as on our culture and setting or location.

On the other hand, reality simply means that which is real or actually happening or occurring. The operational value or condition for reality was the term “actually.” In essence, the reality is actually what is real. Now that operational definitions have been explained, it is pertinent to provide reasons for Mississippi as the geographical location of the study and why.

Mississippi, a rural state with a checkered Civil Rights past, has traditionally been known for its needed improvements in education across various disciplines. With that in mind, public relations as a discipline, historically being a late bloomer in many academic institutions, the researcher thought determining whether the CPRE 2017 Report applied to Mississippi would be an interesting scholarly investigation topic. One respondent to one of the two qualitative items on the quantitative survey even commented that there was no public relations education program in Mississippi when he attended college in 1973-1977. Therefore, a study on Mississippi public relations education offered added value to and increased the body of scholarly knowledge on the discipline, especially when there are perceived gaps in diversity, ethics, and other educational issues.

## CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As far as this study's explorations have determined, relatively no previous scholarly works have assessed or discussed public relations education's perceptions and realities in Mississippi. However, nationally and globally, research related to the topic have flourished and revealed some interesting scholarly investigations on public relations education (i.e., its *pedagogy*, curriculum, teaching approaches). Nevertheless, greater research has focused more closely on public relations practice and less on its education. Therefore, with public relations education or public relations *pedagogy* at the core of this Mississippi-based Study, the researcher extracted relevant reviews from significant and applicable national and global literary works to construct a literature framework for the study.

This national and global literary framework was divided into several divisions to draw a literary map that supported the need for assessing the perceptions and realities of public relations in Mississippi today. This review defined *public relations pedagogy* offered a historical capsule and discussed *pedagogy* in general (i.e., teaching approaches based on different learning theories). Secondly, it explored research on pertinent professional-pedagogical programs and evidence-based practices. Thirdly, this review focused on scholarly works on public relations education and its evidence-based practices (EBP) and learning theories, using much of the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) reports as a foundational framework. And finally, this review will offer a brief section on any applicable or referenced works about Mississippi Public Relations Education.

### *Pedagogy's Origin and Approaches*

The origin of *pedagogy* dates to and (in some forms) beyond Socrates (5th century BC). Socrates is credited as the founding father of education. Pioneering American psychologist, educator, and Clark University first President Granville Stanley Hall shared that the term *pedagogy*, derived from the Greek *pedagogue*.

A *pedagogue* was a slave who generally led boys to and from school, supervising them. Hall indicated in a September 1905 lecture that the word *pedagogy*, at that point, “has expanded from its etymological meaning and is a general designation for the art of teaching” (Hall, 1905, pp. 375-383).

Down through its developmental paths, the term “*pedagogy*” was often used synonymously with the words “teaching” or “education.” Hall further thought it should include “both didactics or the methods of teaching or imparting knowledge or instruction generally on the one hand – all those processes by which information is given – and on the other, education or development from within outward” (Hall, 1905, pp.375-383).

In his widely referenced book, *The History of Pedagogy*, the French scholar of Pedagogy and politician Gabriel Compare (1885) chronicled *pedagogy* from Antiquity to the theory and practice of the science of education in the 19th Century. His book also gave an in-depth accounting of the early teaching approaches or systems of education.

One such system was often the controversially challenged Mutual Instruction approach. Englishmen Andrew Bell (1753-1832) and Joseph Lancaster (1779-1838) are considered “the first authorized propagators of the mutual method,” which was also called the monitorial system. Bell described it as “the method by means of which a whole school may instruct itself, under the supervision of one single master” (Compare, 1885,

pp. 514-518). Educators widely used the mutual method for economic advantages during budgetary shortages. The way the mutual instruction approach worked was the more “intelligent” children, who would serve as monitors, would attend school from eight until 10 in the morning and learn “in haste what they were to, for the rest of the day, to teach to the other children” (p. 518)

Beyond the 20th Century today, mutual instruction can be viewed as the more modern “Each One Teach One” teaching approach, also like the Peer Instruction (Mazur, 2014) and Student-Centered approaches. Although these approaches are not new, they are related to evidence-based instructions because they have proven effective via research and practice during various implementation periods. The CPRE still “seeks to establish benchmarks for teaching public relations that are current research-based, sensitive to culture, and language and application to preparing public relations students for careers in practice, research, teaching or a combination of all three” (The CPRE 2017 Report).

Historically, “Each One Teach One” is an African proverb (Medary, 1966, p.48). The term was used during slavery in which a slave, who learned how to read and write, was required to teach a fellow slave. Frank C. Laubach (1884-1970), a Christian Evangelical missionary, author, and educator who specialized in international literacy, is recognized as the founder of the Each One Teach One literacy teaching method. He is also credited with teaching more than 100 million people to read. This approach is described as a “method that has helped Laubach’s literacy campaigns successful all over the world” (p.48). Mary indicated that “Laubach thought nothing could be better for a newly literate person than to try sharing his skills with a neighbor” (p. 48).

Such skill-sharing and developmental improvements in education have led to several “teaching approaches” and “learning theories” that exist today. Often the two concepts are confused as being synonymous with those outside the realm of education.

### *Professional Pedagogical Programs*

As this review advances the discussion on professional programs and evidence-based practices, it is essential to note that the Each One Teach One model has also served as a professional-pedagogical program. For example, in some areas, its name and principles have been applied to educational projects and program names. For example, a national disaster school response project – Each One Teach One -- by Hamline University of St. Paul, Minnesota helped to restore and improve students’ performance at Martin Luther King Science and Technology School in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina – “a communication disaster as it was a natural and bureaucratic disaster” (Garnett & Kozmin, 2007) which took the lives of 1,242 people (AP, UPI, 2005). The disaster was a public relations challenge for practitioners. The project, funded by a grant from Travelers Insurance, allowed Hamline professors and students to engage in online tutorials and face-to-face educational activities with the MLK Science and Technology School students.

Outcomes of the research-based project, although not over-achingly major, did show “a growth in the students’ attitudes” (Strait & Jones 2008). This project evolved into an outstanding service-learning effort, which was also beneficial to the school, resource-wise.

Service-learning, peer mentoring, and numerous other pedagogical programs and evidence-based practices have proven popular and influential in academic disciplines,



particularly at the collegiate levels. The use of undergraduate teaching assistants (TAs) (Fingerson and Culley, 2001) is among those practices. A study conducted by instructors at McMaster University in Canada gave evidence of effectively training undergraduates teaching assistants in a peer mentor course.

The researchers developed and “implemented a peer mentor course which introduced pedagogically-based teaching principles taken concurrently with a new TA’s first semester of tutoring” (Sana, Pachai & Kim, 2011, p.1). A total of 27 out of 56 undergraduates Introductory to Psychology TAs enrolled in a comprehensive peer mentor training course during the fall semester of 2008. The academic researchers who were instructors hypothesized that “TAs enrolled in training courses would score higher on measures of tutorial/review enjoyment, discussion facilitation, and overall effectiveness compared to TAs who were not enrolled in the training course” (p.5). They found that “although there was no significant difference observed for student ratings for value attributed to review classes, there was a trend towards higher ratings for review classes delivered by trained vs. untrained TAs” (p.6).

The teaching approaches, learning theories or practices: Mutual Instruction and Each One Teach One, and Peer Instructions are only several among many methods that have evolved, been investigated, and implemented via the pedagogy of vast academic disciplines. An accounting of them all would be too numerous and not necessarily applicable to all areas of this study’s scope and nature. Nevertheless, the key to any approach or theory is that it is evidence-based.

### *Evidence-based Practices (EBP)*

In terms of public relations education, Freberg, Remund, and Keltner-Previs (2013) posited that professors must integrate evidence-based practices (EBP) into public relations education to build a stronger foundation for the industry's future considering these fast-paced changes. They argue that "similar to numerous other professional programs in higher education ... public relations are both an applied and theoretical discipline" (p. 235). They believe that EBP in the public relations curriculum will enhance more "comprehensive" critical thinking for both the student and the professor (p. 236).

To support their experimental learning blend of theory and practice argument, Freberg, Remund, and Keltner-Previs (2013) used a quasi-experimental research design composed of three different parts: an in-class scenario exercise, a reaction paper, and an online questionnaire. It is important to note that none of the Introduction to Public Relations undergraduate participants (N= 128) had been formally introduced to the EBP concept in an introductory public relations course. Their study's qualitative and quantitative analyses supported their argument by other researchers (Todd, 2009, p. 84). It indicated that more "proactive communication and engagement among academics and practitioners [is needed] to teach students, the skills and knowledge to be successful in entry-level public relations jobs" (p. 237). Their study also found that public relations education should include discussions on practitioners, clients, and best practices. (p. 237).

Croombs and Rybacki (1999) presented one of the first detailed examinations of public relations *pedagogy* (the method and practice of teaching). Their discussion examined the strengths and weaknesses of public relations pedagogy, compared the

educator and practitioner's perception of the public relations pedagogy, and offered a set of concerns and recommendations. Their paper's focus derived from two research-based data sets: 1) the Survey of Public Relations Curriculum, Outcomes, Assessment, and Pedagogy conducted for the 1998 National Association (NCA) Summer Conference and 2) the group discussions of the Pedagogy Task Team at that conference. The Commission tasked the team at the conference with examining the public relations curriculum and its delivery of course content.

In terms of strengths of public relations pedagogy, Coombs and Rybacki (1999) discovered from the two data sets that the method and teaching of public relations was "steeped in active learning" (p. 56). Their examinations revealed a positive trend of public relations educators involving students in the learning process. The use of instructional delivery techniques (IDT) served as a testament to public relations' active learning orientation. The study identified the top five IDTs and assignments favored by PR educators and PR practitioners. The IDTs were dialogue/class discussion, exercise/application of concepts, lectures, small group discussions, and group work.

The preferred assignments included individual speeches/presentations, group presentations, publicity materials, case studies, and written exercises. Coombs and Rybacki's 1999 examination concluded that the use of media (old and new) and access to media were concerns in terms of weaknesses and improvements needed in public relations pedagogy.

### *The State of Public Relations Education*

DiStaso, Stacks, and Botan published, “State of public relations education in the United States: 2006 report on a national survey of executive and academics.” They surveyed 312 public relations executives and educators, examining how well they thought public relations students were prepared for the “practice, the content and value public relations curricula and, the future of public relations in the United States” (2009, p. 254). They found that both groups wanted to see “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” (p. 254).

Some studies indicate that educators and practitioners agree that the industry’s education programs are on track. Note the following excerpt:

*A survey of 258 public relations educators and practitioners examined the state of public relations education across five dimensions: general perceptions of public relations, education, desired educational outcomes for both students and practitioners, assessment of student outcomes and learning, elements of public relations curricula, and teaching practices. Results indicate educators and practitioners agree that public relations education is on track and that systematic assessment is an important feature of public relations education. They also agreed on how public relations education should be structured and demonstrated a high degree of similarity in their preferences for teaching methods and techniques (Stack, Botan, and Turk, 1999).*

### *More Writing Needed*

Other studies on public relations education have looked at teaching methods and more writing in the public relations curriculum. Hardin and Pompper (2004) explored the writing requirements of 152 Accredited Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication (ASJMC) public relations programs. Their investigation found that only 57% required a news writing course, and less (51%) required a public relations writing course.

They also surveyed 200 public relations practitioners seeking their perception of college public relations educators' writing emphases. Most practitioners believed that both news writing and public relations writing classes should be mandatory for public relations students. Surprisingly, the practitioner showed slightly more interest in the news writing course than public relations writing. Nevertheless, the study's overall recommendations included requiring writing-intensive coursework and encouraging public relations students to seek journalism experience through campus news outlets. (Hardin and Pompper, 2004, p 257).

The CPRE 2017 Report, used as a chosen foundational framework for this Mississippi study on public relations education, also addressed writing as a current concern.

### *Global Vision*

The CPRE 2017 Report also devoted its Chapter 16 to the global perspectives on public relations education. The report indicated that "preparing students to enter the workforce with a global mindset is vital to advancing the profession (p. 149). The Commission recommends that academic institutions – and more specifically the public relations programs within those institutions – place a primary focus on global

interconnectedness and the opportunities it can provide the institution and public relations industry” (p. 149.).

Scholarly interest in ineffective public relations education has also become more of a global plan using various research methods.

Zulhamri Abdullah (2012) used the mixed methods research approach to conduct a longitudinal study on Malaysia’s public relations professionals. Using quantitative and qualitative methods and procedures in his 2003 and 2006 studies, Abdullah’s attempted to capture a clear understanding of what components make up the public relations profession and what elements of PR are significant for its future direction and development in Malaysia. Klang, Malaysia, was chosen as the study’s fieldwork location because it was a “booming” urban area that had grown swiftly, particularly in Malaysia’s public relations development as an industry.

Through such research instruments and procedures as early observations (a pilot study), postal questionnaires, experiments, and in-depth interviews, Abdullah examined PR professionalism’s critical dimensions in the “context of strategic management and multiculturalism” PR academics practitioners, and document review as data collecting sources. His overall aim was to use the mixed method approach to illustrate the importance of improving public relations’ educational and professional standards as a profession. His study implied that mixed research methods are increasing in Asia and may foster a better perception of PR professionalism for “the PR fraternity” (p. 122).

Another global research study on the education method of public relations looked at the growing critical issue of what public relations students should be taught about terrorism. Somerville, Purcell, and Morrison’s (2011) research study assessed students’

and educators' experiences of studying the issue of 'PR and terrorism' at Northern Ireland's largest university. The researchers collected data from undergraduate public relations students via questionnaires designed to ascertain three broad data sets of issues, and they were as follows: issues upon the nature and function of PR; global and international issues related to terrorism and politics; and issues directly related to conflict and peace-building in Northern Ireland.

These three issues prompted their study's following research concerns:

- (RQ1) Northern Ireland PR relations students' understanding of the relationship between "public relations" and "terrorism" both before and after studying them as part of their university curriculum;
- RQ2) Student participants' thoughts on whether it is appropriate to study a topic such as public relations and terrorism in a divided post-conflict society such as Northern Island; and
- RQ3). The pedagogic challenges and strategies that emerge when teaching on controversial issues such as public relations and terrorism.

### *Linking theory to practice*

Thus far, the literature review revealed that scholars have called upon public relations practitioners' numerous times to give their perspective on the field's issues. Jill Boudreaux (2005) conducted a quantitative assessment of public relations practitioners' perception of their relationship with the organization they represent. Boudreaux accomplished this by identifying the role the PR practitioner plays in his or her organization, noting how the organization makes decisions, and measuring the perceived

levels of trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutually from the practitioner's perspective about their organization (p. 44).

She used a survey (both descriptive and analytical) to measure public relations roles, organizational decision-making style, and related components. Although a low response rate was a challenge to the study, it was reliable enough to make significant conclusions. Based on the findings, it was "clear that both public relations roles and organizational decision-making style [have] an impact on the relationship shared between the public relations practitioner and the organization he or she represents" (p. 97). The researcher also concluded that linking theory to practice is essential for organizations with PR departments.

Therefore, she stressed that they need "to invest time and resources into understanding how they can build and maintain better relationships with their practitioners by evaluating the specific decision-making style they use" (p. 97). The researcher stressed that using the rational model might predict that both managers and technicians will be more satisfied with the organization by involving both the public relations manager and technician in the strategic decision-making process.

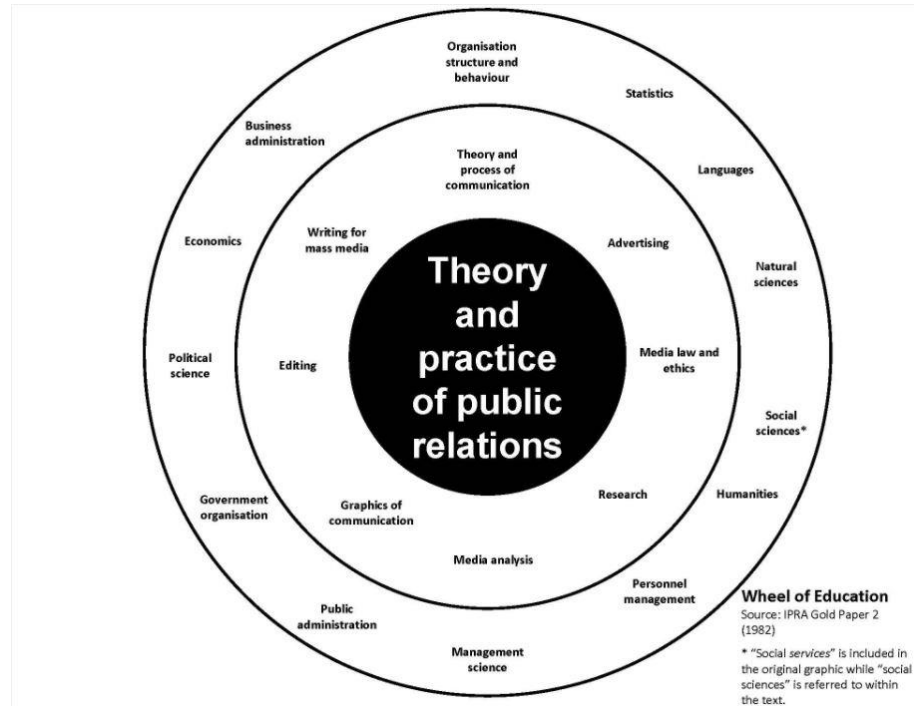
There has been much debate about whether public relations education needs more theory or less theory or less theory and more practice. In a blog post on September 4, 2015, on the Institute for Public Relations website, Dr. Mary Welch, a senior lecturer in communication management of the University of Central Lancashire in the United Kingdom, titled a post, "Time to Reinvent the Wheel for PR Education." She posed the following questions to her readers about the Wheel model, which was produced in the 1970s by Sam Black, an influential British public relations practitioner and a member of



the International Public Relations Association (IPRA):

- 1) Are there elements of the model that you feel are relevant today?
- 2) What is it lacking?
- 3) To What extent do we need to reinvent the 1970s wheel? (Welch, 2015).

*Figure 1. The Wheel of PR Education*



Welch's questions are still pertinent today. This investigator contends that they will continue to be relevant as changes are needed in public relations education to keep up with technological developments and industry demands.

### *Diversity.*

When launching a study on public relations practitioners' review of their public relations education, it was essential to identify any teaching that they received related to diversity and ethics. Diversity and ethics are often encountered in the public relations workforce and the workforce in general. Many practitioners may not be aware of how

vital diversity and ethics are until they must deal with a communication crisis. One of them is at the causal core of the situation. Elizabeth L. Toth (2009) pointed out in one of a series of essays titled, “The SCIENCE Beneath the Art of PUBLIC RELATIONS™,” there is an accelerating influence of diverse groups on the domestic and international practice of public relations (Institute for Public Relations, 2009).

Toth used a sampling of diversity definitions by other scholars and researchers to illustrate its importance. For example, diversity represents categories of people based on differences that cannot be altered, such as age, race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, and physical/qualities; and distinctions that can be changed, such as class, language, income, marital status, religion, geography, and military experiences (Sha and Ford, 2007, p. 386) in (Toth, IPR, 2009).

Brown, White, and Waymer (2011) posited that “diversity in a workforce provides multiple vantage points through which new ways of thinking about problems, ideas, products, and markets can develop” (p. 522). They further emphasized that the initial step to increase diversity in a profession is to make sure it is included in the college academic studies that lead to that profession. To illustrate their argument, they conducted a study titled, “African-American students’ perceptions of public relations education and practice: Implications for minority recruitment.” Their review of the literature revealed that despite the need to address diversity in public relations, in 2005, only 17% of practitioners considered themselves minorities. They offered that the impact of minorities in the public relations industry surfaced as an agenda of interest in PR research more than 20 years ago. The time of their writing was 2011. Therefore, 20 years prior would have been 1991.

Data for their Study gathered face-to-face, in-depth interviews, using a structured interview guide that allowed for open-ended responses. Participants were 16 African Americans (three males and 13 females) who had declared PR as their major at three major research universities in the southeastern United States. There were no significant themes indicated as to why African Americans chose PR as a major. As for the question about whether race played a role in their PR career, the finding was yes. However, they reported that it was an asset in some cases, and in other cases, it was a barrier. One of the study's key recommendations was that academic, public relations programs should bring in minority speakers and hire minority adjuncts.

Diversity is all about relationships. In Brigitte R. Brunner's (2005) study, relationship in public relations is defined, by Broom, Casey, and Ritchey, 1997, p. 96), as a concept that is a part of "social and cultural norms, collective perceptions of uncertain environments and legal/voluntary necessity." Brunner's study examined public relationships and diversity at a large, Southern public university and a mid-sized Midwestern university in the United States. She used a modified version of the Hon and Grundig (1999) scale to measure relationship factors. Students from both universities rated or chose trust, commitment, and satisfaction as crucial relationship factors they had with their higher education institutions. They also believed that their universities valued diversity.

### *Ethics*

What about the issues of ethics in public relations? How do public relations practitioners view ethics in their educational preparations? Kendra Gale and Kristie Bunton (2003) perhaps answered such questions with their study that assesses the impact

of ethics instruction on advertising and public relations graduates. They surveyed 242 respondents who were advertising and public relations alumni from two different institutions: (1) a religiously affiliated, private university in the upper Midwest that required the students to take a media ethics course (n=135); and (2) a research-oriented public university where the ethics course was an option and not a requirement (n=107).

The survey questionnaire instrument looked at five factors in conducting the assessment: (1) exposure to ethics instruction in the undergraduate curriculum; (2) awareness of ethical issues in advertising and public relations; (3) use of ethical reasoning during their professional lives; (4) views about the importance of ethics in the practice of advertising and public relations; and (5) opinions about the social responsibilities and ethical duties of professionals.

The study suggested that ethics training can be a significant influence on students' attitudes about ethical values. In essence, students value what they are taught. As expected, the study indicated that the private institution alumni with the required ethics course were exposed to more ethics in the classroom instruction. The public university alumni reported that few classes had "an adequate discussion on ethics" (p. 277). However, both sets of alumni believed their professors were capable of teaching ethics. Overall, the study indicated that alumni exposed to ethics teaching as undergraduates were more likely to appreciate and use ethical reasoning in their professional life.

In referencing ethical reasoning on the job, Jin-Ae Kang's (2010) study on ethical conflict and job satisfaction among public relations practitioners showed that several public relations practitioners confirmed the existence of a moral conflict in their workplace. Unfortunately, many of them resolved these conflicts by quitting their jobs,

but most hope there would have been a means to resolve such conflict without exodus. The study indicated that the ethical standard of top management usually triggers ethical conflicts. However, participants agree that an environment of open communication, the support of internal stakeholders, and a high professional standard are all vital to foster job satisfaction.

### *Crisis Management*

Perhaps such satisfaction can make the process of handling conflicts and crises so much easier for the public relations professionals, primarily if they were taught and prepared how to do so during their academic studies. Jami Alle VanCamp's dissertation of the University of Oklahoma Graduate College addressed that very issue by asking the research question: "How are universities in the West South Central states that offer baccalaureate programs in public relations, preparing graduates to manage crisis communications situations once they enter their profession?"

During the content analysis of this multiple case study, the universities discovered that no university in Arkansas offered a crisis communication component. Therefore, Arkansas was eliminated from the study. In conclusion, while the other universities in the survey provided the component, recommendations were made that their crisis management instruction is revised and that undergraduate programs should also focus on teaching leadership roles in public relations.

While the literature review has primarily focused on exploring the evidence for this study from the public relations practitioner's perspective, it is critical to note that public relations educators themselves want to ensure adequacy even in crisis management teachings. (CPRE, 2017). The Commission advocated that communication crisis

management provides an engaging mechanism for teaching management-oriented concepts that every organization needs (CPRE, 1999).

### *Technology*

In addition to efficiently knowing how to handle crisis management, both the practitioner, educator, and even the employer must be proficient, extremely knowledgeable, and experienced in keeping up with rapidly changing technology. “Technology does not sit still, and consequently, neither can publications practitioners. Both groups must continue to learn about communication tools and platforms, messaging capabilities on different channels, how audiences are using media, and how to analyze data available” (CPRE, 2017, p.85).

Several studies have addressed concerns about public relations and technology. Melissa A. Johnson’s research gathered “detailed information about public relations practitioners’ new technology use. Seventeen semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. This study described how the use of communication technologies could affect public relations roles. It discussed practitioner challenges associated with diffusing new technologies; practitioner perceptions of technology, organizational status, and power; and how public relations professionals are employing new technologies to improve research, increase productivity, and advance two-way symmetric communication in their organizations.”

### *Why A Study on Mississippi PR Education?*

It is essential for higher education in rural states like Mississippi and others to teach and use up-to-date technologies in their classrooms to effectively compete across all disciplines and professions. That is why a question to ponder for a general frame of

reference was: If benchmarks of the CPRE reports were used today to assess public relations education state by state, how would Mississippi measure up?

Mississippi's public relations education was chosen as the topic of this study's assessment because, as a state, it has historically endured its own public relations or image-building problems due to its checkered past. Its educational needs and full funding of its education system have been news headlines for decades. Today, there are still academic concerns at all levels. Mississippi education is itself a case study for public relations research.

University of Mississippi Professor David G. Sensing (1990) addressed the controversial history of Mississippi's higher education in one of his books titled, *Making haste slowly: The troubled history of higher education in Mississippi*. Sensing illustrated that the state's troubled history of higher education mirrored the state's history over the past two centuries – a record that included a struggle between race and place, wealth and poverty, illiteracy, and literary genius, and conflict and change.

As higher education developed in Mississippi, there is no doubt that various academic disciplines developed to keep pace with the changing social, cultural, economic, and communication dynamics. Most state scholars would perhaps agree that public relations were one of the latest fields of study to enter Mississippi's higher education arena, which again ponders the question: How successful or effective is public relations education in serving its students, and how prepared are they to graduate and enter the public relations profession? Those working in the public relations field and those educating them to do public relations are the best sources for the answers.

### *Research Questions and Rationales*

As reported in Chapter One, the need for public relations curriculum improvements was initially addressed back in the mid-1970s by a commission of educators and practitioners known today as the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE). These educators and practitioners were appointed by the Association for Education in Journalism's (AEJ) Public Relations Division and the Public Relations Society of America (Gibson, 1987). Therefore, as studies have addressed this concern in other areas nationally and internationally, investigations on the topic are novel here.

Therefore, the overall objectives of the study will be as follow:

- 1) To assess what entry-level public relations practitioners should know vs. what they do know;
- 2) To look at what public relations educators think they should teach and what they are teaching; and
- 3) To examine the differences between the two perceptions and/or actuality.

Based on the 2017 CPRE report, the following issues will be examined in the current study:

- **Adequate Research Skills**
- **Strong and Effective Writing Skills Across Multiple Platforms**
- **Adequate Knowledge & Understanding of PR Theory**
- **Adequate Knowledge & Understanding of Ethics in PR**
- **Adequate Technology Knowledge, Skills & Abilities (KSAs)**
- **Ensure More Diversity Student/Educator Based**



- **Improve Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in teaching**
- **Adequate Hands-on Experience**

The perceptions of the participants and the realities of those perceptions were measured using the following research questions:

RQ1a: What do PR practitioners think entry-level PR practitioners should know?

RQ1b: What do entry-level PR practitioners know?

RQ2a: What do PR educators think they should teach?

RQ2b: What do PR educators teach?

RQ3: What are the differences between the two groups?

RQ4: What factors can be used to explain the differences?

## CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

This study assessed the perception and realities of public relations education in Mississippi today via the industry and institution practitioners and educators. The assessment included the following methodological research components: research design, sample (identified in this study as the population/participants) and procedures, measurements, and data analysis. Although this study's original aim was only quantitative, it is essential to note that data collection challenges dictated a need to modify it in early September 2020, with IRB approval, to include a qualitative component. Therefore, the overall study became a two-part study design: Study 1: The Survey and Study 2: The Interviews.

Therefore, this research included quantitative and qualitative data collection processes, which is scholarly, known as mixed-method research. More on factors contributing to a dual-component or mixed-method study's developmental need is explained later in the challenges and/or limitations.

### Study I – The Survey

#### *Research Design*

The research design was quantitative because it primarily collected numerical data analyzed to help conclude (Albers, 2017) and make inferences in assessing public relations education in Mississippi today. The assessment instrument used was a seven-point Likert-type survey distributed to Mississippi public relations practitioners and public relations educators via email and, in some instances, via smartphones. The Likert items used were as follows: 1) strongly agree; 2) agree; 3) somewhat agree; 4) neither; 5) somewhat disagree; 6) disagree; 7) strongly disagree. (*See Appendix A for Survey*).

Why the Likert Scale and why a seven-pointer instead of a five-pointer, one may ask? The researcher concurs with Bishop and Herron (2015) that “Likert, and Likert-type, responses are popular psychometric item scoring schemes for attempting to quantify people’s opinions on different issues” (p. 297). Historically, the Scale “was developed by Rensis Likert (1931), who describe and then developed this technique for the assessment of attitudes” (p. 297). According to Croasmum and Ostrom’s (2011) report, some researchers prefer the seven-item responses or even numbers (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2000) for optimal reliability (Symonds, 1924) (Croasmum and Ostrom, 2011, p. 20). Yet, they put forth that “if there are more than that, the increases in reliability would be so small that it would not be worth the effort to analyze the difference or develop the instrument” (p. 20).

For this study’s survey design, the researcher perceived a seven (7)-item option as giving the intended respondent a balance of variances when trying to assess where he or she stood on various public relations education concerns—the Likert items allowed for more latitude in deep-thinking their responses.

The survey’s context and some of its variables stemmed from most of the essential findings and recommendations revealed in the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) Global Study, *FAST FORWARD: The 2017 Report on Undergraduate Public Relations Education*. The 2017 CPRE report was the foundational framework used to assess its applicability to Mississippi’s public relations education today.

Although the 42-item survey (including demographics) was quantitative by design, it also included and allowed the respondents some latitude to express, in more detail, their perceptions and realities of Mississippi public relations education in terms of

strengths and weaknesses in two qualitative essay items at its end. Commonalities in their answers were noted and used to support the study's discussion, implications, and conclusion.

Why a quantitative-survey research process? Babbie (1998) stressed that survey research is perhaps the best method available to the social scientist interested in collecting original descriptive data from a population too large to observe directly. Considering Babbie's assessment mentioned above about the best practice of survey research, this study fell within the category of having a population too large to observe directly.

#### *Population/Participants*

Initially, the targeted population, as previously mentioned, was the Public Relations Association of Mississippi (PRAM) organization, which has a current membership of 440 members (according to officials). Therefore, it would not have been economically feasible nor safe health-wise (due to the current Coronavirus pandemic) to observe or interview the entire population. According to its website, PRAM is a non-profit organization that is a source of expertise and inspiration and a forum for networking with public relations practitioners throughout the state and region.

*(pramonline.org)*

#### *Sample and Procedures*

Members of the Public Relations Association of Mississippi (PRAM) were initially the targeted group to serve as the sample to represent the public relations practitioners' population. The PRAM members identified as public relations educators served as the sample representatives for the public relations discipline educators.

As the probability of including that the entire population was limited due to access and resources, participants for this study initially had members of the Public Relations Association of Mississippi (PRAM) to represent the practitioners' perspective. It is significant to note that PRAM membership consisted of public relations and/or communication educators and public relations practitioners.

Since not all public relations educators are PRAM members, this researcher conducted a content exploration of Mississippi's colleges and universities' websites for educators who teach public relations courses. As indicated in the instrument design, this polling, plus PRAM members' educators, comprised the participants from the educators' perspective.

Procedurally and timeline-wise, data collection was unexpectedly a lengthy process due to slow returns. Distribution and repeated distribution and data collection efforts included a timeframe of Mid-July 2020 to early September 2020. Since the PRAM policy did not allow direct access to its membership database, the organization offered to aid the researcher by emailing the Qualtrics-powered research survey's electronic hyperlink via its electronic newsletter. PRAM distributed the link with the participation request and a note to encourage to complete the survey during different mailouts: July 14, 2020; July 20, 2020; August 6, 2020; and August 12, 2020.

With time as a critical factor for completing this study and helping boost responses, the researcher in early September 2020 decided to compile a convenience sample of her network of public relations practitioners and educators (PRAM and Non-PRAM) who may not have seen the survey request. The convenience sample, which snowballs sampling as a strategic tool, generated a list of 50 practitioners and educators.

The researcher sent the anonymous survey link to those individuals via email, text, and inbox on Messenger.

Total repeated and final data collection efforts yielded the sample size for this study of 71 responses (N=71), including 53 public relations practitioners and 18 public relations educators.

### *Measurements*

The word “think” is synonymous with the word “perception,” and “actually” is “realities” to derive the variables from the above-listed research questions. It is essential to remember that perceptions and realities are at the root conceptualization of this study.

Study I of this research used quantitative descriptive analysis to measure RQ1 and RQ2. The outcome determined (via respondents’ perception) what the public relations practitioners should know based on chosen recommendations from the CPRE 2017 report versus the respondents’ knowledge or experience of what Mississippi public relations entry-level practitioners actually know or experienced to be the case. The descriptive measures used to analyze the quantitative data were Frequency (F), Mean (M), and Standard Deviation (SD). An ANOVA compared whether there were significant differences in the two groups for RQ3. To answer RQ4, information from the interviews of Study II was used to determine factors causing any significant differences among the public relations practitioners and the public relations educators in Mississippi.

## Study II – The Interview

As previously mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, challenges (that equated to initial alarming low responses) during the data collection process dictated a need to modify and conduct a complementary study to ascertain more data to sufficiently continue the research. The development of that component did not change the original study's scope, currently known as Study I of the comprehensive research. The complementary research, labeled as Study II, was conducted to enhance the research with added qualitative data. That data looked at perceptual strengths, weaknesses, the applicability of three of the recommendations (writing, diversity, and ethics) of the CPRE 2017 report to Mississippi's public relations education, and its future outlook from practitioners' and educators' perspectives.

### *Research Design*

The research design used for Study II was a qualitative research method. Gilgun (2014) contended that "researchers do this style of research not only because what they learn is interesting, but because they want to do useful research; that is, research that leads to social actions and even transformations, such as policies, programs, and interventions" (p. 3). The methodology used for Study II fell within those lines as put forth by Gilgun's paper, "Writing Up Qualitative Research." The data ascertained from this public relations education in Mississippi adds to the body of knowledge and can stir up awareness of a need to improve it where needed.

### *Participants*

In line with the participants of study I, the participants of Study II were also Mississippi public relations practitioners (n=5) and Mississippi public relations educators

(n=5). Each of them also completed the quantitative survey of Study I as well. For Study II, participants were asked to provide their perceptions and comments based on their experience and knowledge in public relations education in the Magnolia State. The total participating sample for this complimentary study was ten (N=10). The researcher derived the model as a result of convenience and snowball sampling efforts.

#### *Procedures/Data Collection Process*

D.W. Turner, III (2010) reasoned that “one of the more popular areas of interest in qualitative research designed is that of the interview protocol. Interviews provide in-depth information pertaining to participants’ experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic” (p. 754). In concurrence with Turner’s reasoning, the interview was used as the data collection instrument for its process. (*See Interview Protocol in Appendix C.*)

Procedurally, the principal investigator emailed the interview protocol, which consisted of the letter of participation request, the protocol guidelines, the consent form, and the interview questions were emailed to each of the participants. Due to university health policy and federal health crisis regulations in place due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the investigator assured prospective interviewees that they would not be asked to participate in face-to-face interviews in adherence to social distancing guidelines.

Study II participants had a choice of virtual video conferencing interviews, email, or telephone interviews. Most of them opted for the email process and the remainder by telephone. Those choosing telephone interviews were asked on the consent form in the interview protocol to provide available times within their schedule for which the researcher could interview them. Since data-collection timing was extremely crucial at



that point, several interviewees also preferred the email process. The researcher requested all to return their consent forms and their responses immediately.

### *Instrument*

As already noted in the prior subsection, the researcher used interviews to gather the qualitative data for this component. It is significant to note that the research questions for Study II extracted the same assessment variables: perceptions and realities, but via interviewees' thoughts (perceptions) on the strengths, weaknesses, and future outlook for public relations education in Mississippi. They were also asked whether they believed that CPRE 2017 Report recommendations and/or concerns for more vital public relations writing skills, diversity and inclusions, and ethics were also applicable to or in line with the needs of public relations education in Mississippi, why or why not?

The approach used was the Standardized Open-Ended Interview, which allowed the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire, and it also allows the researcher to ask probing follow-up questions if warranted (Turner, III, p. 756). The following four items were the questions in the Standardized Open-Ended Interview design for Study II:

- 1) Based on your knowledge and experience with public relations education in Mississippi, what would you say are its strengths? Why and give examples for your answer?
- 2) Based on your knowledge and experience with public relations education in Mississippi, what would you say are its weaknesses? Why and give examples for your answer?

3) In its 2017 Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) Report, the commission made several critical recommendations about public relations education overall. Three of those recommendations were centered on public relations students' writing preparedness for every format, positioning diversity and inclusion as a true organizational value, and adding a required course in ethics is essential. For Mississippi's public relations education, would you say these same recommendations are applicable? Why or why not?

4) How do you see the future for public relations education in Mississippi?

#### *Data Analysis*

The data or textual analysis process used for Study II was a technique known as “Pawing.” This technique, highly recommended by Ryan and Bernard (2003), has been used by many researchers. Ryan and Bernard describe pawing in the following passage:

We highly recommend pawing through texts and marking them up with different colored highlighter pens. Sandelowski (1995a:373) observes that analysis of texts begins with proofreading the material and simply underlining key phrases “because they make some as yet inchoate sense.” Bernard (2000) refers to this as the *ocular scan method*, otherwise known as *eyeballing*. In this method, you get a feel for the text by handling your data multiple times. [Bogdan and Biklen (1982:165) suggest reading over the text at least twice.] Researchers have been known to spread their texts out on the floor, tack bunches of them to a bulletin board, and sort them into different file folders. By living with the data, investigators can eventually perform the interocular percussion test—which is where you wait for patterns to hit you between the eyes.

Therefore, for Study II, the researcher (after transcribing the participants' interviews) used a multi-color highlighting process to read and mark commonalities discovered among their comments and opinions. These commonalities helped to build theme identifications that offered insights and answers to the interview questions and directly and indirectly supported most of the objectives and RQs for overall research.

In addition to the participants' common themes, several unique or anomaly perceptions, views, and opinions were also noted when they significantly stood out from the pattern of other responses.

## CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

Before presenting the data and its results, it is essential to reiterate the purpose and the objectives of this two-component study for clarity and review. The overall goals of the study were as follow:

- 1) To assess what entry-level public relations practitioners should know vs. what they do know;
- 2) To look at what public relations educators think they should teach and what they are teaching; and
- 3) To examine the differences between the two perceptions and/or actuality.

### Study I – The Survey

#### *Survey respondent profile*

Before delving into the core analysis of the respondents' perception and reality of public relations education in Mississippi, this study provides in the following paragraphs, tables, and graphics a statistical profile of who they were in terms of some significant and relevant demographics. Although participating in surveys is strictly voluntary, Glaser (2012) pointed out in his publication, *Handbook of Survey Methodology for the Social Sciences Glaser*, that respondent cooperation and profile are essential and can have some practical implications for future research and theories (p. 195). Relevant to this study, such profile demographics can also infer some evidence of the respondents' reliability and expertise in making perception and reality assessments about PR education in Mississippi.

Final data collection for study I yielded a total of 71 (N=71) usable responses.

Table 1 indicates a statistical breakdown of the N size and percentage for each respondent's participation category:

Table 1

*Participant by Category*

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
PRAM Member - PR Practitioner	42	59.2
Non-PRAM Member - PR Practitioner	11	15.5
PRAM Member - PR Educator	8	11.3
Non-PRAM Member - PR Educator	10	14.1

*Note.* The total sample for this study was N=71.

As seen in Table 1, respondents included 42 PRAM member practitioners at 59% of N-71 represented the most extensive participation in the study. Eleven Non-PRAM member PR practitioners at 15.5% were the next largest participants. There were eight (11.3%) responding PRAM members identified as PR educators, and 10 (14.1%) responding PR educators who identified as Non-PRAM members. There were respectively a total of 18 (25.4%) Mississippi public relations educators and 53 (74.5%) Mississippi public relations practitioners.

Other significant respondent profile information pertinent to this study were demographic data listed in the sequent Table 2.1 through 2.6. Those variables are as

follows: age, gender, education, APR accreditation, and years of public relations experience.

**Table 2.1**

*Age of Respondents*

Age Range	N	%
25-34	12	16.9
35-44	12	16.9
45-54	23	32.4
55 or older	24	33.8

As indicated in Table 2.1, most participants were 55 or older at 33.8% of N-71. This indicates that most of the respondents were veteran public relations professionals (practitioners or educators). The next largest group was between 45-54 at 32.4%. Age group or age ranges 25-34 and 35-44, tied with 12 respondents each for a percentage of 16.9%. As one can see, age is significant to any study, as an indicator when respondent experience and reliability are valued and necessary in making quality and critical assessments.

In terms of race, 45 (63.4%) of the respondents were White/Caucasian, and 25 (35.2%) African Americans in Table 2.2. There was only one other race: an Asian participant (1.4%). More details relevant to the race demographic are discussed in the next chapter regarding its significant implications to diversity and inclusions.

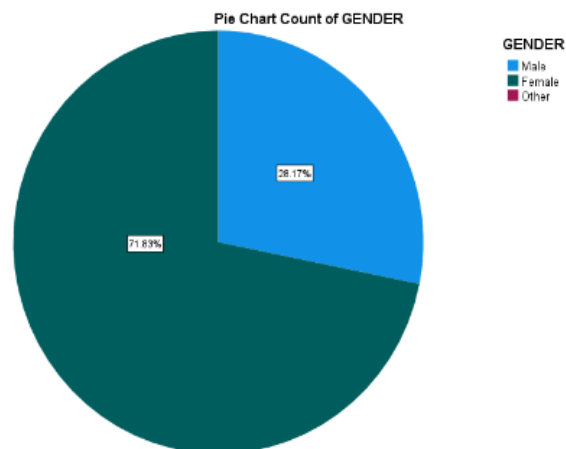
**Table 2.2**

*Race of Respondents*

Respondent	N	%
White / Caucasian	45	63.4
African American	25	35.2
Asian	1	1.4

The results also indicated that the female, N-51 (71.8%), more than doubled the males, N-20 (28.2%) of the individuals responding to this Mississippi survey targeting public relations practitioners or educators. Note: There were no responses to the gender option labeled Other on the survey. These figures perhaps speak volumes about the gender make-up of the public relations professionals in Mississippi. With this being a small but essential, representative sample of Mississippi's population of public relations practitioners and public relations educators, one could argue a reverse-order gender gap as illustrated by the pie chart below:

*Figure 2. Gender for Respondents*



Respondents' education level is another critical profile element which gives evidence to their reliability and qualification in making assessments about their discipline and industry. Table 2.3 illustrates that nearly half of the survey participants have master's degrees, 25.2%, four-college degrees, and 12.7% earned Doctoral and/or Professional Degrees. Only three reported two-year degrees or some college.

**Table 2.3**

*Education Level Completed*

<b>Respondents Educ.</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Some College	2	2.8
2-year College Degree	1	1.4
4-year College Degree	25	35.2
Master's Degree	34	47.9
Doctoral Degree / Professional Degree)	9	12.7

It is also significant to note that in addition to their degrees, 17 (23.9%) of them hold the distinction of an earned Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) Certificate, and three are seeking APR. What does obtaining an APR credentialing mean? According to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA): "The Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) credential certifies your drive, professionalism, and principles, setting you apart from your peers and positioning you as a leader and mentor in the competitive public relations field. The APR: 1) asserts professional competence; 2) communicates professional expertise, plus personal and professional dedication and values, and 3)



reflect progressive public relations industry practices and high standards” (*PRSA: Public Relations Society of America*).

Years of experience in public relations is another essential profile element of the respondents. Table 2.4 highlights a capsule view of some of their vast years of experience respondents have gained in the field:

**Table 2.4**

*Years of Public Relations Experience*

<b>Years</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
10	9	12.7
25	6	8.5
30	5	7.0
40+	3	4.2

*Note.* The lowest years of service was one year reported by one respondent.

Now that some detailed description and pertinent demographic data have been statistically established and profiled about our study’s participants' qualifications, the following section analyses their perceptions and realities via the research questions (RQs) set for this study via the prompts designed in the data-collection survey. This analysis is presented question by question.

### Analysis of Research Questions

#### *PR practitioners: Perception*

#### **RQ1a: What do PR practitioners think entry-level PR practitioners should know?**

The first research question (RQ1a) explored the perception of what PR practitioners think entry-level PR practitioners should know? Respondents were asked in

RQ1a and in the other RQs to assess, using a 7-point Likert-item of agreement or disagreement, what entry-level PR practitioners, right out of college in Mississippi, should demonstrate the following knowledge and skills:

- **Adequate Research Skills**
- **Strong and Effective Writing Skills Across Multiple Platforms**
- **Adequate Knowledge & Understanding of PR Theory**
- **Adequate Knowledge & Understanding of Ethics in PR**
- **Adequate Technology Knowledge, Skills & Abilities (KSAs)**
- **Ensure More Diversity Student/Educator Based**
- **Improve Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in teaching**
- **Adequate Hands-on Experiences**

Note, the recommendations mentioned above are not all-inclusive of the Commission on Public Relations Report (CPRE, 2017).

Based on the responses to RQ1a of practitioners in Mississippi, most responding public relations practitioners either strongly agreed or agreed with the education, knowledge, and skills recommendations entry-level practitioners should have when entering the field. Table 3 presents a statistical view of their perception by a percentage of agreement or disagreement with the afore-mentioned descriptive public relations recommendations from the CPRE 2017 Report. The percentages in Table 3 are calculated based on the number (n=53) of practitioners responding to the survey.

**Table 3***Descriptive of Perception (Practitioners)*

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Agreement Level</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Adequate research skills</b>	Strongly agree	25(47.1)
	Agree	18(33.9)
	Somewhat agree	7(13.2)
	Neither agree nor disagree	1(1.8)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0.0)
	Disagree	2(3.7)
	Strongly disagree	0(0.0)
<b>Strong multi-media Writing</b>	Strongly agree	42(79.2)
	Agree	2(3.7)
	Somewhat agree	3(5.6)
	Neither agree nor disagree	0(0.0)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0.0)
	Disagree	0(0.0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0.0)
<b>Adequate PR Theory</b>	Strongly agree	9(16.9)
	Agree	29(54.7)
	Somewhat agree	12(22.6)
	Neither agree nor disagree	1(1.8)
	Somewhat disagree	2(3.7)
	Disagree	0(0.0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0.0)

**Table 3 (continues).**

<b>Ethics</b>	Strongly agree	36(67.9)
	Agree	15(28.3)
	Somewhat agree	2 (3.7)
	Neither agree nor	
	disagree	0(0.0)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0.0)
	Disagree	0(0.0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0.0)
<b>Adequate Technology KSAs</b>	Strongly agree	26(49.0)
	Agree	21(39.6)
	Somewhat agree	4(7.5)
	Neither agree nor	
	disagree	2(3.7)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0.0)
	Disagree	0(0.0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0.0)

---

**Table 3 (continues).***Descriptive of Perception (Practitioners)*

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Agreement Level</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>More Diversity Student/Educator Base</b>	Strongly agree	24(45.2)
	Agree	18(33.9)
	Somewhat agree	4(7.5)
	Neither agree nor disagree	7(13.2)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0.0)
	Disagree	0(0.0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0.0)
<b>Improve D&amp;I in Curriculum</b>	Strongly agree	23(43.3)
	Agree	20(37.7)
	Somewhat agree	2(3.7)
	Neither agree nor disagree	8(15.0)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0.0)
	Disagree	0(0.0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0.0)
<b>More PR Hands-on</b>	Strongly agree	38(54)
	Agree	22(31)
	Somewhat agree	5(10)
	Neither agree nor disagree	6(8)
	Somewhat disagree	3(4)
	Disagree	1(1)
	Strongly disagree	1(1)

According to the frequency of public relations practitioners (n=53) to prompts, which asked what they think entry-level public relations practitioners in Mississippi should know, the top five strongly agreed answers are demonstrated in Table 3. Number One was strong and effective writing skills at 79%. The next highest perception was more knowledge and understanding of ethics in public relations at 68.%. Also strongly agreed upon concerns included that entry-level public relations practitioners needed adequate Technology KSAs at 49.0%, adequate research skills (47%), and adequate technology skills, 45%.

Although those public relations education concerns ranked as the top five of the Likert-item: strongly agree, it is significant to note that needed improvement or increase in diversity and inclusion in teaching earned a worth mentioning the percentage of 40%. These perceptions are like those found by the CPRE 2017 Report, although not particularly in any type of ranking order.

#### *PR practitioners: Reality*

#### **RQ1b: What do entry-level PR practitioners know?**

Based on their knowledge and experience with the above-referenced RQ1b, the respondents were asked to provide their level of agreement as to whether the entry-level public relations practitioners in Mississippi actually know what they should know. It is essential to point out that respondents were reliable and qualified to give educated, insightful, and expert assessments of both parts of RQ1 because of their level of education and vast years of experience as reported in the subtopic on their profile. Table 4 reports their responses to RQ1b:

**Table 4***Descriptive of Reality (Practitioners)*

<b>Knows</b>	<b>Agreement Level</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Entry-level MS PR grads demonstrate adequate Research Skills</b>	Strongly agree	2(2.8)
	Agree	8(11.2)
	Somewhat agree	15(21.1)
	Neither agree nor disagree	16(22.53)
	Somewhat disagree	8(11.26)
	Disagree	4(5.6)
	Strongly disagree	0 (0.0)
<b>Entry-level MS PR grads demonstrate Strong multi-media writing skills</b>	Strongly agree	5(7.0)
	Agree	8(11.26)
	Somewhat agree	16(22.53)
	Neither agree nor disagree	7(9.85)
	Somewhat disagree	13(18.3)
	Disagree	2(2.8)
<b>Entry-level MS PR grads demonstrate adequate K&amp;U of PR Theory</b>	Strongly agree	2(2.8)
	Agree	2(2.8)
	Somewhat agree	1(1.4)
	Neither agree nor disagree	8(11.26)
	Somewhat disagree	10(14.0)
	Disagree	25(35.2)
	Strongly disagree	6(8.45)
		3(8.45)
		1(1.4)

**Table 4 (continues).***Descriptive of Reality (Practitioners)*

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Agreement Level</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Entry-level MS PR grads enter WF w/ adequate K&amp;U of PR Ethics</b>	Strongly agree	4(5.6)
	Agree	9(12.6)
	Somewhat agree	15(21.1)
	Neither agree nor disagree	19(26.76) 6(8.45)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0.0)
	Disagree	6(8.4)
	Strongly disagree	
<b>Entry-level MS PR grads enter WF w/ adequate KSAs of Tech</b>	Strongly agree	2(2.8)
	Agree	25(35.2)
	Somewhat agree	13(18.3)
	Neither agree nor disagree	10(14.8) 1(1.4)
	Somewhat disagree	1(1.4)
	Disagree	1(1.4)
	Strongly disagree	



**Table 4 (continues).***Descriptive of Reality (Practitioners)*

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Agreement Level</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>MS PR academic programs ensure a more diverse student-educator base.</b>	Strongly agree	4(5.6)
	Agree	11(15.49)
	Somewhat agree	8(11.2)
	Neither agree nor disagree	20(28.16)
	Somewhat disagree	8(11.26)
	Disagree	2(2.8)
	Strongly disagree	0(0.0)
<b>MS PR academic programs actually making needed changes in D&amp;I</b>	Strongly agree	2(2.8)
	Agree	7(9.85)
	Somewhat agree	4(5.6)
	Neither agree nor disagree	30(42.25)
	Somewhat disagree	7(9.8)
	Disagree	3(4.2)
	Strongly disagree	0(0.0)
<b>Entry-level MS PR grads enter WF w/ adequate Global PR K&amp;P</b>	Strongly agree	1(1.4)
	Agree	5(7.0)
	Somewhat agree	12(16.0)
	Neither agree nor disagree	22(31)
	Somewhat disagree	9(12.67)
	Disagree	4(5.6)
	Strongly disagree	1(1.4)

### *PR Educator: Perception*

#### *RQ2a: What do PR educators think they should teach?*

The public relations educators (n=18) participating in this survey offered insightful and valuable expert opinions to the essay items included at the end of the survey instrument, which will be delineated more in the discussion chapter. However, their responses to the instrument's quantitative component yielded some interesting numbers about their perceptions and realities of what they should teach (RQ2a). They are at the core of public relations education in Mississippi. As discovered in the respond profile section, they are equipped to measure some of the recommendations drawn from the CPRE 2017 report as a foundational framework for assessing Mississippi public relations education.

Table 5 indicates a summary of their thinking about whether they agree or disagree on whether the same recommendations apply to the public relations education discipline in the Magnolia State. The table shows that most of the responding public relations educators (n=18) strongly agreed at an 83% level that there is a need for stronger and more effective writing skills across multiple platforms for Mississippi's undergraduate public relations students.

More ethics at 66% was the next highest strongly agreed-upon perception of educators should be teach followed by strongly agreement levels for educators to enhance their own Technology KSAs at 61%; facilitate more hands-on practice for PR students, 55%; and more diversity and inclusions in teaching, 50%.

**Table 5***Descriptive of Perception (PR Educators)*

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Agreement Level</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>More research skills</b>	Strongly agree	5(28)
	Agree	8(44)
	Somewhat agree	4(22)
	Neither agree nor disagree	1(6)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0.0)
	Disagree	0(0.0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0.0)
<b>More Theory</b>	Strongly agree	3(16)
	Agree	7(39)
	Somewhat agree	4(22)
	Neither agree nor disagree	4(22)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0)
	Disagree	0(0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0)
<b>Stronger Writing</b>	Strongly agree	15(83)
	Agree	3(17)
	Somewhat agree	3(17)
	Neither agree nor disagree	0(0)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0)
	Disagree	0(0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0)
<b>Ethics</b>	Strongly agree	12(66)
	Agree	3(17)

**Table 5 (continues).**

	Somewhat agree	3(17)
	Neither agree nor disagree	0(0)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0)
	Disagree	0(0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0)
<b>Diversity</b>	Strongly agree	8(44)
<b>S/E Base</b>	Agree	8(44)
	Somewhat agree	2(11)
	Neither agree nor disagree	0(0)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0)
	Disagree	0(0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0)
<b>D &amp; I</b>	Strongly agree	9(50)
	Agree	5(28)
	Somewhat agree	1(6)
	Neither agree nor disagree	0(0)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0)
	Disagree	0(0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0)
<b>Enhanced Tech</b>	Strongly agree	11(61)
<b>KSAs</b>	Agree	7(38)
	Somewhat agree	0(0)
	Neither agree nor disagree	0(0)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0)

**Table 5 (continues).**

Disagree	0(0)
Strongly disagree	0(0)
<b>Hands-on</b>	
Strongly agree	10(55)
Agree	5(28)
Somewhat agree	2(11)
Neither agree nor disagree	1(6)
Somewhat disagree	0(0.0)
Disagree	0(0.0)
Strongly disagree	0(0.0)

---

*Note.* The remaining 17% indicated that they agreed.

It is important to note here that Mississippi's public relations educators' perceptions of appearing to be near in sync with the CPRE 2017 report's key concerns recommended an additional course in ethics. The report emphasized that the CPRE knew that "the role of ethics as a tenet of [the public relations] professions was going to be the core of this report" even before they first heard such terms as "alternative facts" and "fake news" (CPRE 2017).

The full report can be found at <http://www.commissionpred.org/commission-reports/fast-forward-foundations-future-state-educators-practitioners/>

Regarding writing, the CPRE 2017 report stressed that PR industry leaders indicated a concerning number of entry-level graduates are not showing up on the first PR jobs sufficiently equipped in writing across multiple platforms. We see from this data,

in the Mississippi study, that it is also a concern of its public relations educators and practitioners as well (prior noted in Tables 4).

*PR Educator: Reality*

**RQ2b: What do PR educators teach?**

In this section, data lends itself to reflect the public relations educators' knowledge of what they "actually" teach. The researcher needs to emphasize here that none of this study's aims were intended in any way as an indictment against participating groups in this study. This subsection is critical as it presents somewhat of a quantitative self-study or reality by the public relations educators of what they teach. This study is anonymous, removing any reason for possible integrity concerns. Assessing one's profession, industry, and own performances have been practiced for decade decades, if not for centuries.

**Table 6**

*Descriptive of Reality (PR Educators)*

<b>Actually</b>	<b>Agreement Level</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Enough PR research skills</b>	Strongly agree	1(6)
	Agree	4(22)
	Somewhat agree	7(39)
	Neither agree nor disagree	4(22)
	Somewhat disagree	2(11)
	Disagree	0(0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0)
<b>Enough PR theory</b>	Strongly agree	1(6)
	Agree	6(33)

**Table 6 (continues).**

	Somewhat agree	5(28)
	Neither agree nor disagree	6(33)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0)
	Disagree	0(0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0)
<b>Enough strong writing skills</b>	Strongly agree	4(22)
	Agree	3(17)
	Somewhat agree	7(39)
	Neither agree nor disagree	4(22)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0)
	Disagree	0(0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0)
<b>Enough ethics</b>	Strongly agree	4(22)
	Agree	6(33)
	Somewhat agree	4(22)
	Neither agree nor disagree	4(22)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0)
	Disagree	0(0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0)
<b>Enough D &amp; I</b>	Strongly agree	2(11)
	Agree	6(33)
	Somewhat agree	3(17)
	Neither agree nor disagree	6(33)
	Somewhat disagree	1(6)
	Disagree	0(0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0)

**Table 6**  
(continues).

<b>Enough enhanced technology KSAs</b>	Strongly agree	3(17)
	Agree	5(28)
	Somewhat agree	6(33)
	Neither agree nor disagree	3(17)
	Somewhat disagree	0(0)
	Disagree	1(6)
	Strongly disagree	0(0)
<b>Enough hands-on</b>	Strongly agree	2(11)
	Agree	7(39)
	Somewhat agree	5(28)
	Neither agree nor disagree	3(17)
	Somewhat disagree	1(6)
	Disagree	0(0)
	Strongly disagree	0(0)

---

*Note.* Percentages in Table 6 were based on the PR educators' n-size of 18.

While public relations educators perceived at a level of 28% in Table 5 that they strongly agreed that entry-level practitioners needed more research skills, in Table 6, there is an actual reality of 33% rate of those who strongly agreed that entry-level practitioners actually have enough public relation research skills in Mississippi public relations on education today.

In other *reality concepts* assessed, Mississippi public relations educators believed that in the area of areas of ethics diversity and inclusion in teaching enhanced meant of



their own technical skills in hands-on in these areas data indicate that there was a trending agreement, but that was enough obvious educational teaching and training taken place hi elder for enhancing their own technology skills 33% agree that there is actually enough over there doing it 33% somewhat agreed and 17% some work disagreed with the assessments which were commonalities among the data. Also, pertinent to the evaluation, data indicated that in terms of more need for diversity in the student-and-educator base, 11% somewhat disagreed.

In comparing the Mississippi public relations Educators with the Commission on public relations of 2017 report, it is readily seen that beer assessment uh the reality of population education in Mississippi is some different point findings in the CPRE report of 2017. In this study, Mississippi educators believed that there is actually enough public relations research being taught in the state's educational institutions. Therefore, their belief is different from the CPRE study, which reported that more research remains a bedrock of professional public relations.

#### *Differences Between Practitioners and Educators*

#### **RQ3: What are the differences between the two groups?**

To compare responses between public relations practitioners and educators, an ANOVA was conducted. No significant differences were found in terms of perception. However, practitioners and educators differed in whether they believed Mississippi's academic, public relations programs ensured a more diverse student and educator base,  $F(1, 67) = 4.06, p = .048$ . Practitioners ( $M = 3.47, SD = 1.37$ ) reported lower scores than educator ( $M = 2.69, SD = 1.35$ ).

**Table 7.1***Actually, diverse Student and Faculty Base*

Variable	Practitioners		Educators		<i>F</i> (1, 67)	P-value
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Diverse Student and Faculty Base	3.47	1.37	2.69	1.35	4.06	.048

The significance illustrated in Table 7.1 tells us that the practitioners, in reality, did not strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree as the educators did that Mississippi academic programs actually ensure a more diverse student and educator base.

**Table 7.2***Actually, changes in teaching diversity*

Variable	Practitioners		Educators		<i>F</i> (1, 67)
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Diversity & Inclusion in teaching	3.77	1.12	2.81	1.22	8.67

In Table 7.2, in terms of improved Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) teaching, a significant difference was found at the agreed level. Here, again the practitioners' score was lower, meaning that they did not fully agree with the educators that this condition occurs in the PR classroom to the extent to deduce that it is enough.

**Table 7.3***Actually, teach strong and effective writing*

Variable	Practitioners		Educators		<i>F</i> (1, 67)	P-value
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Teach strong and effective writing	3.83	1.53	2.50	1.10	9.88	.002

Again, in Table 7.3, the practitioners and the educators show a significant difference. As also determined prior, the practitioners disagree that enough strong and effective writing occurs in Mississippi public relations education.

**Table 7.4***Actually, teach enough ethics*

Variable	Practitioners		Educators		<i>F</i> (1, 67)	P-value
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Teach enough ethics	3.43	1.25	2.38	1.09	9.35	.003

*Note.* The same significant difference can be reported here about ethics.

**Table 7.5***Actually, enhance own technology skills*

Variable	Practitioners		Educators		<i>F</i> (1, 67)	P-value
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Enhance own technology skills	3.51	1.40	2.63	1.31	5.07	.028

Although statistically significant, in Table 7.5, it is essential to note that the practitioners at the Likert-item agree level agreed more than the educators enhance their technology skills. This was somewhat unexpected since all other categorical variables were trending, just the opposite between the two groups.

**Table 7.6**

*Enough hands-on*

Variable	Practitioners		Educators		<i>F</i> (1, 67)	P-value
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Enough Hands-on	3.47	1.31	2.63	1.09	5.52	.022

In terms of hands-on provided to the students, educators felt, more so than the practitioners, that there is enough, a significant difference in comparing the two.

### **Factors contributing to differences**

*RQ4: What factors can be used to explain the differences?*

One factor that can explain the differences between the two groups is how each group rated overall public relations education in Mississippi based on the ordinal data in the survey on a scale from 1-10, with ten being the highest. The public relations practitioners' (n=53) average overall rating was M=6.93, lower than the public relations educators' average of M 7.79. The practitioners' ratings ranged from as low as 2.00 to 10.00; whereas, the educators' (n=18) ratings ranged from 6.00 to 9.50.

Also, qualitative lenses from Study II's participants' views of diversity, writing, and ethics are other factors that can be used to explain the differences, especially since

they were weaknesses. These factors or reasons reported from the interviews are listed below with an indication in parentheses from which group each element stemmed:

1. difficulty in keeping up with new technology (PR Practitioner)
2. faculty's experience or lack of experience in the industry (PR Educator)
3. lack of diversity in student body and faculty (PR Practitioner and PR Educator)
4. lack of funding (PR Educators)
5. access to internships (PR Educators)

Stronger and effective writing education across multiple platforms and more ethics were also among factors contributing to the significant differences between the actualities of the public relations practitioners and the public relations educators.

## Study II

As noted in the methodology chapter, this research is comprised of two sub-studies. Therefore, this subsection analyzed the text of each interviewee's transcript using the pawing technique for each interview question. The researcher gave some attention during the discussion to the most often repeated theme and several anomaly answers that stood or were not in sync with the pattern(s).

As previously mentioned, the questions here for Study II were differently stated than those of the main RQs. Still, they effectively extract qualitative data to support the applicable RQs of the overall study. The interview study reported these findings, as shown and described by the following qualitative data displays. As shown in Table 8, it is evident that both the public relations practitioners and public relations provided a variety of strengths that they believed Mississippi PR education programs, professionals, and educators possess today. While several shared common themes, for the most part, each of

them had slightly different descriptions of what they saw as positives or strengths of PR education in the state.

**Table 8**

*MS PR Education Strengths*

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Qualitative Responses</b>
<b>1) Based on your knowledge and experience with public relations education in Mississippi, what would you say are its strengths? Why and give examples for your answer?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good job in providing PR educational foundation (P) (E)</li> <li>• Qualified educators with real practical experience (E)</li> <li>• Vast information related to research and theories (P)</li> <li>• Smart and passionate higher education PR faculty (E)</li> <li>• Great influence, good reach, and good relationship (P)</li> <li>• Great understanding of PR issues /why people respond (P)</li> <li>• PRAM and the opportunities it provides to students (E) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective public relations education programs (P)</li> <li>• Mississippi's culture, "very welcoming people" (E)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The focus on writing, technology/multi-media skills (E)</li> <li>• Mississippi PR programs that are in great media markets (P)</li> </ul>

*Note.* (P) means view stems from a practitioner, (E), educator, and (P) (E), both.

Among those listed is shown that educators went so far as attributing the state's culture of having "very welcoming people" as a strength in its public relations education. This perception was somewhat of an anomaly from the pattern of the other contextual comments. During the interview, the educator gave reasoning and an example of why she responded the way she did. Below is an excerpt from the educator's transcript in her own words:

*Our culture, as a rule, is polite, less direct, and more aware of social niceties. Although this seems odd, it makes sense that it would make a difference in the way students learn and lean into the subtleties of public relations. So much of it is based on reading and understanding audiences that our experience maintaining social balance could only be helpful. My best examples come from students who graduated from a Mississippi school and went to work in other parts of the country. The cases of which I'm thinking of students who went to Washington DC and another to Washington state. Both excelled at what they did and were astute observers of people. They did very well. In discussing their success, I came to believe that a large part of it was that they were raised in a very connected culture and knew how to build bridges and watch for potential threats a business might encounter. (Interviewee no. 20-100-09).*

Another different insight that stood out is that some programs are stronger because they are in great media markets, as pointed out by a veteran public relations practitioner. It is also pertinent to share the correlation between great media markets and strong public relations education programs. She stated: "I can only speak to my experience. I think one of the strengths of the program that I went through was that it was in a market that had a great amount of media. It was kind of the hub for media and PR in the state in many ways. And that while we got book instruction and knowledge, our department was wise enough to also draw on the resources of those in the market to come in and talk about how to apply that knowledge in a practical way." (Interviewee, 20-100-01).

This subsection of Study II's reporting of qualitative data continued with the next data displays. After this, it referenced any noted connection to any of the general study RQs. This study's following query was like the first, except its phraseology called for a textual change from strengths to weaknesses of public relations education in Mississippi. Table 9 delineates the participants' perception of those weaknesses:

**Table 9**

*MS PR Education Weaknesses*

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Qualitative Responses</b>
<b>2) Based on your knowledge and experience with public relations education in Mississippi, what would you say are its weaknesses? Why and give examples for your answer?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity (P)</li> <li>• Weak in PR theory, teaching ethics &amp; research teaching (E) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So little understanding of what public relations is (E)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• More PR writing for students and some teachers (P) (E) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lack of resources, funding to stay “ahead” (E) (P)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Social media, writing speeches, public speaking skills (P) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lack of PR internship opportunities for HBCU's (E)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Emphasis on understanding the culture of our subjects (P) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students need more real-world/hands-on (P)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• “USM, the only accredited [PR] program, a weakness” (E) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mississippi too slow in transitioning to PR degrees (P) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The biggest challenge, field changes too fast (P)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• No networking between schools that teach PR (E)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

As displayed, in no intentional order of ranking, Table 9 notably indicated one more weakness than Table 8 did strengths. Although the next item called for applicability of the CPRE 2017's concerns regarding writing, diversity, and ethics, educators and practitioners have already labeled them as weaknesses in Table 2 as indicated by the following perceptions of weaknesses:



- Weak in PR theory, teaching ethics & research teaching (E)
- Diversity (P)
- More PR writing for students and some teachers (P) (E)

As determined in Table 1, there are weaknesses stated that are somewhat different than the other weaknesses. Again, they may be defined as anomalies. As a research disclaimer for the ones which appear which have a factual connotation by nature, this research nor its principal investigation has substantiated them as information. They are explicitly the opinions and statements of the interviewee who made them. The weaknesses which seem to stand out differently connotation-wise were the following:

- “USM, the only accredited [PR] program, is a weakness” (E)
- No networking between schools that teach PR (E)
- Seemingly a lack of PR internship opportunities for HBCU’s (E)

A closer lens on Study II’s strengths and weaknesses of Mississippi public relations education will be further discussed in Chapter IV. However, for now, this reporting of data advances to the next inquiry of study on the qualitative interview instrument: In its 2017 Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) Report, the commission made several critical recommendations about public relations education overall. Three of those recommendations were centered on public relations students’ writing preparedness for every format, positioning diversity and inclusion as a true organizational value, and adding a required course in ethics is essential. For Mississippi’s public relations education, would you say these same recommendations are applicable? Why or why not?

Although there was no expressed intent of this study to ascertain how many of the 10 participants would agree with the question, it is significant to note that 100% replied in the affirmative to the items' closed-ended nature. Conversely, their “Why” or “Why Not” reasons for their “yes” answer varied but also included some notable common themes.

Again, offering a narrative of their responses to this question was no doubt deemed by this researcher too extensive and risky of losing the readers’ (scholar or not) attention in trying to digest so much qualitative data without some type of summary or capsule visualization. Therefore, a qualitative display table was employed to delineate those themes of reasons for agreement.

In the interest of clarity and understanding, the investigator combined two or more perceptions with similar values and connotations to limit the number of items in the tab; therefore, making it easier on the eye and the psyche. Table 10 capsules Mississippi’s public relations practitioners’ and educators’ reasons for believing that the writing, diversity and inclusion, and ethics recommendations and concerns of the CPRE are also central to the status of their state’s public relations education:

**Table 10**

*Reasons More Writing, D&I, and Ethics Are Need in MS PR Education*

Interview Question	Qualitative Responses
<p><b>3) In its 2017 Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) Report, the commission made several key recommendations about PR education overall. Three of those recommendations were centered on public relations students' writing preparedness for every format, positioning diversity and inclusion as a true organizational value, and adding a required course in ethics is essential. For Mississippi's public relations education, would you say these same recommendations are applicable? Why or why not?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing is [our] foundation; we must do it well (P) (E)</li> <li>• More in-depth &amp; multi-platform writing needed (P) (E)</li> <li>• Teaching skills vast more important than platforms (P)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PR accreditation set similar standards</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Writing, the number-one demand in PR workplace (E)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We all need to help our students write more (E)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Some student graduate HS with poor writing skills (P)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing preparedness stressed in my course (E)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• MS is a diverse population; we need more D&amp;I (P) (E)</li> <li>• Diversity = growth when different cultures are at table (P)</li> <li>• Diversity class needed (racial, gender, disabilities, too pretty, etc.) (P)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More diversity needed in PRAM and workforce (P)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• PR made great diversity strides in past decades (E) (P)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• True D&amp;I come from the top down; not a class (E)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ethics comes from moral values; you can't teach it (E)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adding an ethics component is imperative</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The reasons above why Mississippi public relations practitioners and educators affirmed that the three qualitative variables: writing, diversity and inclusion, and ethics are similar in needs for the state indicate that more comments and views were made about the importance of strong and effective writing than any of the other two elements. Although she agreed, one educator also explained that diversity, inclusion, and ethics could not be subjected to classroom learning. They had personal values ties that were based on those values. Her level of agreement with the overall question was, “I somewhat agree.” (Interviewee 20-100-10).

The final questions asked the participants to share their perception or perspective on how they saw the future for public relations education in Mississippi. Most of them indicated “bright” or “promising.” Others had these concerns:

- Would like to see a PR force that broad and diverse in representing various cultures (P);
- Future should be more crisis-management and real-life training focused (P);
- Would like to see more emphasis placed on accreditation and certification (E); as one participant concluded
- “I’m not sure. I think COVID-19 has changed how we teach, and so, I am a bit unsure of what the future looks like. I hope that there is a focus on diversity and inclusion and the continued focus on technology and innovation.” (Interviewee 20-100-09)

## CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses and summarizes the most important or significant findings of this study as they relate to the overall purpose of the research, which was to assess public relations education in Mississippi through the perceptions and realities of its practitioners and educators, using several of the recommendations from the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) 2017 Report as a foundational framework. It is important to reiterate that this is a two-part study: Study I, basically the quantitative component; and Study II, the qualitative part. As structured in each of the previous two chapters, the discussion (containing meaning, importance, and relevancy of the results) will also be offered respectively of the two components.

### Study I and Study II

#### *Summary of Key Findings*

Based on the overall analysis of data reported from the survey for Study I, the most essential results indicated via an ANOVA revealed a significant difference between Mississippi public relations practitioners and public relations educators' beliefs for six of the CPRE concerns or categorical variables looked at to assess their perceptions and realities. There were no significant differences found in comparison to the two groups' perceptions.

With the public relations practitioners from the ANOVA reporting the lower scores, the groups differed in whether they believed that 1) Mississippi's academic public relations programs ensured a more diverse student and educator base; 2) Mississippi's academic public relations programs had made adequate changes in teaching diversity; 3) Mississippi's academic public relations programs adequately teach strong and effective

writing; 4) Mississippi's academic public relations programs adequately teach enough ethics; 5) Mississippi's academic public relations programs adequately enhance technology skills; 6) Mississippi's educational public relations programs adequately provide hands-on activities.

In addition to the above-mentioned critical significant differences, it is also notable that descriptive data analysis of this study illustrated that 42(79%) of the practitioners (n=53) perceived the need for more strong and effective multi-media writing skills for entry-level practitioners, and 15(83%) of the educators (n=18) perceived the same need. Another pertinent finding to this study was how both groups combined rated public relations education in Mississippi overall on a scale of 1-10, with ten being the best, an 8 (11%) among the total cases (N=71). Only one respondent rated Mississippi PR education a 10(1.4%). Ranking below 8 ranged from 2.0 up to 7.60.

In Study II, which qualitatively assessed Mississippi public relations education's strengths and weaknesses, the 10 participants interviewed (five practitioners and five educators) mirrored with their verbal perceptions, opinions, views, and comments what Study I revealed in the numbers or quantitative data. Plus, they all agreed that writing, diversity, and ethics, drawn from the CPRE 2017 Report, were undoubtedly applicable to Mississippi's public relations education.

There were several different or unique opinions or allegations resulting from the interviews that were note-worthy for further discussion in this chapter. They were as follows: 1) Having only one accredited [PR] program in the state is a weakness; 2) No networking between schools that teach PR; 3) Seemingly a lack of PR internship opportunities for HBCUs.

### *Interpretation of Results*

This study's findings answered the RQs about what Mississippi public relations practitioners (n=53) think entry-level practitioners should know versus what they know. They also answered what Mississippi public relations program educators (n=18) think they should be teaching versus what they are teaching and whether there was a significant difference between the perceptions and realities of both groups (N=71). The study also confirmed the applicability of eight recommendations from the CPRE 2017 Report to Mississippi's academic, public relations programs.

While the data indicated that public relations educators believed that Mississippi's academic, public relations programs are adequately preparing its entry-level practitioners in the area of strong and effective writing skills, enhanced technology, ethics, hands-on experiences and that they are ensuring a diverse student-educator based and changes in diversity and inclusion (D&I) teaching, the state's programs' overall rating eight (8) on a scale of one to 10 is good. However, it does leave room for improvement. This need is supported because 42(79%) experienced public relations practitioners (n=53) who completed this survey perceived the place for stronger and effective multi-media writing as this state's program's greatest need.

Hermeneutically, these results were in line with the foundational framework for this study and drew close connections with the literature theoretical framework. For example, a theoretical frame of reference for this study is the concept, *pedagogy*, derived from the Greek word, *pedagogue*, meaning a slave who generally led boys to and from school, supervising them. The term "expanded from its etymological meaning and is a general designation for the art of teaching." (Hall, 1905, pp. 375-383). Therefore, while

much of the language in this study repeatedly referred to the topic as public relations education, it is about public relations pedagogy.

To further delve into this connection between data found and related studies, it is essential to pause and define pedagogy, the “art of teaching.” Therefore, with that conceptional definition, this study has been about the art of teaching public relations from its practitioners’ and educators’ perspectives.

There is no doubt that teachings and learning occur via a multiplicity of theories, approaches, and systems. Therefore, when the data in this dual study called for more hands-on or practical application in public relations education, it is historically similar to earlier pedagogical approaches such as mutual instruction or mutual method accredited to Englishmen Andrew Bell (1753-1832) and Joseph Lancaster (1779-1828). in which scholars taught themselves with a headmaster as a facilitator. That is why perhaps even today, many disciplines (including public relations) have labs to accompany their courses, to provide that added practical value, and to foster more skill learning processes.

Regardless of education level, several evidence-based pedagogical approaches provide hands-on: Peer Instruction (Mazur, 2014); Each One Teach One was founded by author and educator Frank C. Laubach (1884-1970); and others.

As a point of historical reference, it is essential to note that the concept of Each One Teach One is an African proverb (Medary, 1966, p. 48) in which slaves who learned how to read and write were required to teach fellow slaves to do the same.

To further draw the data-to-theoretical framework connection even closer, it is important to stress for understanding that the vital link to the public relations education process is supported by Freberg, Remund, and Keltner-Previs (2013). They argued that



“similar to numerous other professional programs in higher education...public relations are both an applied and theoretical discipline.” (p. 235). They substantiated this argument via a quasi-experimental research design consisting of three parts: an in-class scenario exercise, a reaction paper, and an online questionnaire with Introduction to Public Relations undergraduates participants (N=128) who had no formal introduction to the EBP concept. They believed that EBP in the public relations curriculum would enhance more “comprehensive” critical thinking for both the student and the professor (p. 236).

Given their findings and considering the key results of this Mississippi study, this researcher contends that the significant differences between the beliefs of the public relations practitioners (who scored lower during the ANOVA of the realities or actualities) and the public relations educators illustrated a need for balance in the areas in which the significant differences were found. That need for more balance further aligns with Freberg, Remund, and Keltner-Previs (2013) finding that more “proactive communication and engagement among academics and practitioner [are needed] to teach students, the skills and knowledge to be successful in entry-level public relations jobs.” (p. 237).

When something is different, it is often a natural occurrence, but a significant distinction connotes a high possibility and plausibility of balance. Successful entry-level public relations practitioners must be the product of balanced working engagements between the educator and professionals. That balance can be most effective when it occurs in the data-revealed curricular areas of stronger multi-media writing skills, diversity in student-educator base, diversity, and inclusion in “pedagogy,” ethics, enhanced technology, and hands-on.

## *Writing*

Writing is a skill gained by practice, but it begins with ideas (preferably EBP theories on how to write). It is essential to any discipline and should be required. Hardin and Pompper (2004) explored the writing requirements of 152 Accredited Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication (ASJMC) public relations programs. They found that only 57% required a news writing course, and less (51%) required a public relations writing course. They also surveyed 200 public relations practitioners seeking their perception of college public relations educators' writing emphases. Most practitioners believed that both news writing and public relations writing classes should be mandatory for public relations students. Surprisingly, the practitioner showed slightly more interest in the news writing course than public relations writing. Nevertheless, the study's overall recommendations included requiring writing-intensive coursework and encouraging public relations students to seek journalism experience through campus news outlets. (Hardin and Pompper, 2004, p., 257).

That recommendation is in line with what one of Study II's interviewees did as she began her public relations career. She sought a temporary walk in the journalist's shoes to gain valuable knowledge and practice from the other side of the spectrum to affect her marketability as a viable public relations practitioner. That within itself was a start in gaining writing experience and different communication experiences across media lines. Today, with social media, it is called multimedia platforms.

## *Diversity, D&I, and Ethics*

These three concerns were discussed together here because, as one of the public relations education interviewees so insightfully stressed, these are more about moral

values, in her opinion, than concepts taught or gained in a classroom. Considering the essence of her argument, this researcher concurs from that perspective. For further clarity on her stance, an excerpt of her comment is shared below:

*Teaching diversity and inclusion as organizational values sound good, but I don't think that can be taught just like ethics cannot be taught. True diversity and inclusion as an organizational value are not going to come from entry-level PR graduates; that comes from the top down. Those in power [must] value diversity and inclusion. Also, we discuss ethics across all courses, but they are a function of one's personal morals and values. You can discuss ethics; you can't teach it.* (Interviewee, 20-100-09).

Her point is valid; however, research also suggested that undergraduate ethics training can influence ethical values, as evidenced by Gale and Bunton's (2003) comparison of public relations alumni of a private institution with a required ethics course and a public institution without one. Overall, their study indicated that alumni from the private school were more likely to appreciate and use ethical reasoning in their professional life.

In reference to whether academic programs need to ensure a more diverse student-educator base, participants in Study II concurred 100%. One practitioner's views on the matter are shared below:

*...diversity in the field is important because our audiences are diverse, and you need to be able to communicate in a way that accounts for your audience's diversity. So, each of us has individual life experiences, individual perspectives as our audience does. And, we're not going to be able to, as an individual, speak to*

*every individual in our audience. We are only able to do that if the team is diverse as well.* (Interviewee, 20-100-05).

Again, the perceptions or views gathered from Study II, like the numerical data found in Study I, significantly parallel the concerns of the CPRE 2017 Report on diversity.

The Mississippi public relations participants who responded to Study I's survey were 45(63%) whites/Caucasians, 25(35%), African Americans, and one (1.4%) Asian. The nation's racial divide for the public relations industry is stressed in the passage below from a case-specific article based on several scholarly resources titled, "The Public Relations Industry Is Too White, and the Solution Starts with Higher Education."

"The problem is that public relations (PR) remain a majority-white profession. A 2018 *Harvard Business Review* analysis of federal labor statistics found the industry is 87.9 percent White, 8.3 percent African American, 2.6 percent Asian American, and 5.7 percent Hispanic or Latinx. Industry leaders are still trying to figure out how to improve those numbers, which become even starker in the C-suite. Though women make up 70 percent of the entire PR workforce, they represent only 30 percent of agency executives" (Landis, 2019).

Two take-a-ways from Landis's article that is in line with the inferences and implications of this Mississippi study's data and interviews were as follow: 1) "Some students simply don't know public relations is an option as an area of study because much of the work happens behind the scenes"(Landis, 2019) and 2) "Solutions to the problem has to begin with higher education or even before."

It is critical now more than ever to the increased cultural melting pot of our nation. According to CPRE itself, "this is a problem that not only must be addressed by

the industry but also by educators, who need to help students prepare for what they may encounter on the job” (CPRE, 2017). One critical point the Commission pointed out is that if minority entry-level practitioners become disenchanted due to a lack of preparedness in what to expect, their word of mouth in sharing it can blemish the industry. This Mississippi study, like the CPRE, recommended that serious attention be given to the diversity issue. It is indeed no longer a business case; it is a case of “simply doing what is the right thing to do” (CPRE, 2017) is.

#### *Enhanced Technology KSAs*

This study also showed a significant difference between the practitioners’ and educators’ reality in the educators' need to enhance their technical knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Although the educators felt they were improving their technological KSAs enough, it did not negate that improvements should be made in this area, as pointed out by the practitioners' descriptive data. They are in the field and often on the receiving end of the entry-level practitioners that the educators help to produce. The Commission itself confirmed and reported it best:

In addition to efficiently knowing how to handle crisis management, both the practitioner, educator, and even the employer must be proficient; strong knowledge and practice in keeping up with rapidly changing technology are crucial. “Technology does not sit still, and consequently, neither can publications practitioners. Both groups must continue to learn about communication tools and platforms, messaging capabilities on different channels, how audiences are using media, and how to analyze data available” (CPRE, 2017, p.85).

### *Hands-on*

Since much discussion and theoretical connections have been made regarding the importance of practice in public relations (whether it is done through labs, classroom activities, internships, social media, etc.), no further interpretive discourse is needed here hands-on.

### *Implications of Study I and Study II*

Further studies should consider this Mississippi public relations study's findings because it reinforces the importance of public relations educators and practitioners strongly working together to produce highly qualified and diverse entry-level practitioners to fill industry-changing demand. The dual approach of conducting two studies within this overall scope added valuable qualitative details from primary sources (the interviews) to complement the initial study (Study I).

As shown by the connection to previous studies in the interpretation section, this Mississippi study on academic, public relations programs clearly aligned with existing knowledge. Such an alignment indicated similar concerns and findings from those studies (i.e., diversity continuing to be both an industry and higher education problem with greater and equally shared responsibilities and accountabilities of public relations educators and practitioners to become agents of change in closing the diversity gaps.)

Fortunately, this study's results were not vastly different from other assessments found for public relations education's theoretical framework. The analysis's practical applications add to the body of knowledge of research on public relations education in general but more significantly for Mississippi because limited to no case-specific available research was found. Another practical application is that this study can serve as

a useful academic research resource for public relations students looking for reviews on Mississippi's public relations as this researcher did and found none.

Differences in perception and realities, nationally and internationally, between public relations educators and public relations educators on its education, are also nothing new. Shen and Toth (2013) found similar expectations, differences, and concerns resulting from their 1999 and 2011 studies on what practitioners and educators thought a master's program in public relations graduate students should know (p. 619). However, their results provided "useful guidance on how to deliver professional public relations master's degree programs" (p.620).

### *Limitations*

In terms of limitations, this research study met with many unexpected challenges that slowed its progress, especially during the data collection process. Data collection obstacles resulted in a smaller than desired and needed sample size (N=71), considering that there are 440 PRAM members, according to officials. Although the small sample size limited the results' generalizability, the researcher assures readers and users of this information that the research and findings are authentic and valuable.

### *Conclusion and Recommendations*

In sum, this investigator recommends that this study on Mississippi's academic public relations programs be repeated or replicated, with strategic public relations tactics in place. Further recommendations are that this research will spark an interest in other scholars or public relations educators and practitioners to apply more investigative and assessment lenses to other aspects of public relations academia in Mississippi. This author suggests that future researchers should consider further studies on Mississippi's public relations academically and professionally. More of such scholarly studies should focus on other states with a limited body of knowledge on their public relations academics. Perhaps strategic public relations processes such as the still-useful RACE (research, action planning, communication, evaluation) model developed by John Marston (1963) can be employed to occasionally determine the need for assessing public relations education significantly since the industry changes so constantly. Perhaps in periodically conducting such public relations education assessments, we will not be debating public relations' diversity and ethics for another 30 years.

In conclusion, our state and nation have become melting pots of diverse cultures, races, ethnicities, gender preferences, abilities, and disabilities. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) public relations theories/models: Press Agency Model; Public Information Model; Two Way Asymmetric Model and Two-Way Symmetric Model have experienced various changes and adaptations times, and so should public relations education in Mississippi and anywhere.



## APPENDIX A – Cover Letter and Survey

### **Introduction / Consent**

Dear PR Practitioner or PR Educator:

Thank you for participating in this study. The purpose is to assess public relations education in Mississippi today via the perceptions and realities of public relations practitioners and public relations educators.

The entire survey should only take about 10-15 minutes to complete. Your honest opinions will be greatly valued, and the information obtained will remain confidential to the extent allowed by law. The results may be published, but your personal information will not be used.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions concerning the study, please contact [irb@usm.edu](mailto:irb@usm.edu).

**IMPORTANT:** On clicking "Next," you agree that you are 18 years of age or older and consent to participate. The link for the survey is below:

[https://usmuw.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_1H1tp5KYfH2LEOx](https://usmuw.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1H1tp5KYfH2LEOx)

Your immediate response is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,  
Gail Hargrove Marshall Brown  
Ph.D. Candidate & Principal Investigator

## Survey

Q1 Your Participation Category (Check One)

- ☐ A PRAM Member - PR Practitioner
- ☐ A PRAM Member - PR Educator
- ☐ A Non-PRAM Member - PR Practitioner
- ☐ A Non-PRAM Member - PR Educator

Q2 What is your age?

- ☐ 18-24 years old
- ☐ 25-34 years old
- ☐ 35-44 years old
- ☐ 45-54 years old
- ☐ 55 or older

Q3 What is your race?

- ☐ White / Caucasian
- ☐ African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native American / American Indian
- ☐ Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other

Q4 What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other

Q5 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ Some College
- ☐ 2-year College Degree
- ☐ 4-year College Degree
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ Doctoral Degree / Professional Degree (JD, MD)

Q6 Are you an APR accredited public relations practitioner?

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO
- ☐ Currently seeking APR

Q7 Were you a public relations major or minor during your undergraduate studies?

- ☐ Yes, PR major
- ☐ Yes, PR minor
- ☐ No. Specify major

Q8 Was the college or university where you received your public relations education in-state (Mississippi) or out of state?

- ☐ In-state (Mississippi)

☐ Out of State (Specify state)

Q9 Was your college or university a four-year or two-year institution or trade school?

☐ Four-year institution

☐ Two-year institution

☐ Trade school

Q10 What type of organization or business do you currently work?

☐ For-Profit

☐ Non-Profit or Not-for-Profit

☐ Education Institution

☐ Government

☐ Self Employed

Q11 How many years of experience do you have in public relations?

Q12 **Based on what you think, please indicate your answer to the following questions:** Public relations practitioners at entry-level positions, right out of college in Mississippi, **should** demonstrate adequate *research skills*.

☐ Strongly agree

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q13 Entry-level public relations practitioners, right out of college in Mississippi, **should** show up on their first jobs, demonstrating strong and effective *writing skills*.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q14 Entry-level public relations practitioners, right out of college in Mississippi, **should** enter the workforce with an adequate knowledge and understanding of *public relations theory*.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree

- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q15 Entry-level public relations practitioners, right out of college in Mississippi, **should** enter the workforce with an adequate knowledge and understanding of *ethics* in public relations.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q16 Entry-level public relations practitioners, right out of college in Mississippi, **should** enter the workforce with adequate knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) in *technology* as tools for effective public relations.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree

- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q17 Mississippi's academic public relations departments and programs **should** ensure a more *diverse* student and educator base.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q18 Mississippi's academic public relations department and programs **should** make needed changes in how *diversity* and *inclusion* (D&I) are taught.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

Q19 Entry-level public relations practitioners, right out of college in Mississippi, **should** enter the workforce with adequate *global* knowledge and perspective of public relations.

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

Q20 Public Relations educators in Mississippi **should** teach more public relations *research*.

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree



☐ Strongly disagree

Q21 Public Relations educators in Mississippi **should** teach more public relations *theory*.

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

Q22 Public Relations educators in Mississippi **should** teach more strong and effective public relations *writing* across multiple platforms (i.e., writing for the web.)

☒ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

Q23 Public Relations educators in Mississippi **should** teach more on *ethics* in public relations.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q24 Public Relations educators in Mississippi **should** enhance their own *technology* Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs).

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q25 Public Relations educators in Mississippi **should** teach/facilitate more hands-on public relations in and outside of the classroom.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

**Q26 Based on what you know is actuality, please answer the following questions:** Public relations practitioners at entry-level positions, right out of college in Mississippi, **actually** demonstrate adequate *research skills*.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

**Q27** Entry-level public relations practitioners, right out of college in Mississippi, **actually** show up on their first jobs, demonstrating strong and effective *writing skills*.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q28 Entry-level public relations practitioners, right out of college in Mississippi, **actually** enter the workforce with an adequate knowledge and understanding of *public relations theory*.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q29 Entry-level public relations practitioners, right out of college in Mississippi, **actually** enter the workforce with an adequate knowledge and understanding of *ethics* in public relations.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree

- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q30 Entry-level public relations practitioners, right out of college in Mississippi, **actually** enter the workforce with adequate knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) in *technology* as tools for effective public relations.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q31 Mississippi's academic public relations departments and programs **actually** ensure a more diverse student and educator base.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree

- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q32 Mississippi's academic public relations department and programs are **actually** making needed changes in how *diversity and inclusion* (D&I) are taught.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q33 Entry-level public relations practitioners, right out of college in Mississippi, **actually** enter the workforce with adequate *global* knowledge and perspective of public relations.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

Q34 Public Relations educators in Mississippi **actually** teach enough public relations *research*.

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

Q35 Public Relations educators in Mississippi **actually** teach enough public relations *theory*.

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

Q36 Public Relations educators in Mississippi **actually** teach enough strong and effective public relations *writing* across multiple platforms (i.e., writing for the web.)

☐ Strongly agree

☐ Agree

☐ Somewhat agree

☐ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Somewhat disagree

- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q37 Public Relations educators in Mississippi **actually** teach enough *ethics* in public relations.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q38 Public Relations educators in Mississippi **actually** enhance their own *technological* knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs).

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree



Q39 Public Relations educators in Mississippi **actually** teach/facilitate more hands-on public relations in and outside of the classroom.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Q40 On a scale of 1-10, with ten being the best, please rate the public relations education program that prepared you.

	01	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall Rating of the PR Education that Prepared You										

Q41 Based on all knowledge and experience you have with public relations education in Mississippi, on a scale of 1-10, with ten being the best, how would you rate it today?

	01	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall Rating of Public Relations Education in Mississippi Today										

Q42 How do you feel about public relations education in Mississippi today (i.e., strengths, weaknesses, its future)?

▲

▼

◀

▶

## APPENDIX B – IRB Approval Letters

### Office of Research Integrity

118 COLLEGE DRIVE #5125 • HATTIESBURG, MS | 601.266.6576 | USM.EDU/ORI



#### NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.
- FACE-TO-FACE DATA COLLECTION WILL NOT COMMENCE UNTIL USM'S IRB MODIFIES THE DIRECTIVE TO HALT NON-ESSENTIAL (NO DIRECT BENEFIT TO PARTICIPANTS) RESEARCH.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-20-100

PROJECT TITLE: Public Relations Education in Mississippi Today: Perceptions and Realities

SCHOOL/PROGRAM: School of COMM, Journalism, Public Relations,

RESEARCHER(S): Gail Brown, Fei Xue

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved

CATEGORY: Expedited

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: June 3, 2020

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donald Sacco".

**Donald Sacco, Ph.D.**  
**Institutional Review Board Chairperson**

**Modification Institutional Review Board Approval**

The University of Southern Mississippi's Office of Research Integrity has received the notice of your modification for your submission Public Relations Education in Mississippi Today: Perceptions and Realities (IRB #: IRB-20-100).

Your modification has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.
- Face-to-Face data collection may not commence without prior approval from the Vice President for Research's Office.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-20-100

PROJECT TITLE: Public Relations Education in Mississippi Today: Perceptions and Realities

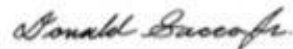
SCHOOL/PROGRAM: School of COMM, Journalism, Public Relations,

RESEARCHER(S): Gail Brown, Fei Xue

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: September 3, 2020



Donald Sacco, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

## APPENDIX C – Interview Protocol/Consent for Study II

### **I. Introductory Protocol & Invitation to the Interview**

#### **Introduction**

Dear PR Practitioner or PR Educator

I am Gail Hargrove Marshall Brown, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, with a major in Mass Communication (Public Relations Emphasis). I respectfully invite you to participate in somewhat of a novel study for Mississippi as an interviewee. Your identity will not be revealed. The data collected from you and all participants will be primarily presented in aggregated form. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to decline this invitation to participate. The purpose of the study is to assess public relations education in Mississippi today via the perceptions and realities of public relations practitioners and public relations educators. Questions will be structured around your opinion of the strengths and weaknesses of public relations education in Mississippi and why. For example: How do you feel about public relations education in Mississippi today (i.e., strengths, weaknesses, its future) and why?

If you are interested in participating, please review the attached informed consent statement and form and return it as soon as possible to schedule a time to be interviewed. If you have questions before considering consent, absolutely feel free to contact me via email at [gail.brown@usm.edu](mailto:gail.brown@usm.edu) or via telephone (call or text) at (601) 613-0869.

Due to COVID-19 guidelines, please be assured that this will not be a face-to-face physical interview. It will be conducted virtually via Zoom, by phone, or email, if

necessary, at a time of your convenience. Your opinions will be greatly valued for research purposes only. Results may be published (in aggregated form), but you nor your personal information will be identified in any manner. Your participation will greatly add to the limited body of knowledge on public relations education research in Mississippi.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions concerning the study, please contact [irb@usm.edu](mailto:irb@usm.edu).

Please return the attached Consent Statement to [gail.brown@usm.edu](mailto:gail.brown@usm.edu). If you have completed the survey pertaining to this study, the interview is needed to acquire more detailed data. Your immediate response is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Gail Hargrove Marshall Brown

Ph.D. Candidate & Principal Investigator

Attachment

## II. Consent Statement/Form

**Directions:** *Please complete, sign, and date this statement. Immediately return it via email to [gail.brown@usm.edu](mailto:gail.brown@usm.edu) or by fax (not shared) to (601) 924-0396. Thank you.*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, voluntarily agree to participate in this research study based on the information in the above invitation letter and based on the following understandings:

- I agree that I am a consenting adult 18 years and over.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I may feel free to withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I may withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case, the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research but will know the personal reward of contributing to public relations educational research that could add to the body of knowledge and possibly lead to any needed changes in Mississippi's public relations education.
- I understand that my name will not be used nor recorded during or after the interview. Data collected from my interview will be coded as data from Participant No. 00-000-00 (whatever my assigned number is. I further understand that I will be told that number at the beginning of the interview.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded for needed accuracy and clarity purposes.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially to the extent of the law.
- I understand that my identity will remain anonymous in any report on the results of this research.
- I understand that the interview will be conducted virtually, by phone, or, if necessary, via email to practice and follow the COVID-19 guidelines about social distancing, etc.

Please indicate the best days and times to schedule your online virtual or telephone interview. (Interview will take less than 30 minutes of your time). (You will be provided virtual credentials for participating)

---

Your best telephone contact number (It will not be shared.) \_\_\_\_\_

Your best email address (It will not be shared.) \_\_\_\_\_

PRAM Member \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No | PR Educator \_\_\_\_ or PR Practitioner \_\_\_\_

(Check One)

---

Signature of Consenting Participant

---

Date Signed



### **III. Procedure for the Interview**

The purpose of this interview is to ascertain your opinion via your perception and reality of public relations education in Mississippi today. It helps collect data useful to this study, assessing public relations practitioners and public relations educators' perspectives. The researcher will interview in the following manner:

- 1) Extend an invitation to prospective participants from a sample compiled by the researcher of Mississippi public relations educators and practitioners from PRAM and non-PRAM members
- 2) Invite 10-15 respondents to a follow-up interview, via email, phone, or online chat, to further discuss their responses to the survey questions. The interview protocol and sample questions are attached.
- 3) Set up the interviews via on-line (virtually) or telephone with the participants. The researcher will record the interview if the participant has agreed for accuracy and documentation purposes.
- 4) Conduct the interview at the time scheduled. Remind the participant that the interview is being identity will not be reviewed in the research.
- 5) Guide the participants through the interview to ensure they are confident and comfortable that they can be open with their opinions without any fears.

- 6) Pay close attention to the time promised and stick to it.
- 7) Thank the participant for the interview and assure them that their information was of great assistance to the study.

#### **IV. Interview Questions**

- 1) Based on your knowledge and experience with public relations education in Mississippi, what would you say are its strengths? Why and give examples for your answer?
- 2) Based on your knowledge and experience with public relations education in Mississippi, what would you say are its weaknesses? Why and give examples for your answer?
- 3) In its 2017 Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) Report, the commission made several key recommendations about public relations education overall. Three of those recommendations were centered on public relations students' writing preparedness for every format, positioning diversity and inclusion as a true organizational value, and adding a required course in ethics is essential. For Mississippi's public relations education, would you say these same recommendations are applicable? Why or why not?
- 4) How do you see the future for public relations education in Mississippi?

# APPENDIX D – A List of PR Courses in Mississippi

Belhaven University	COM 309 Intro to Public Relations* COM 405 Prep for Cert in Public Relations COM 418 PR Campaigns
The University of Southern Mississippi	MCJ329- Introduction to Public Relations and Advertising MCJ422- Writing and Design for Public Relations and Advertising MCJ426- Public Relations and Ad Research MCJ428- Public Relations Ad Campaigns MCJ483- Seminar in Public Relations
Mississippi Valley State University	MC 430 Public Relations MC 431 Advanced Public Relations MC 440 Public Relations Research MC 442 Public Relations Campaigns
Tougaloo College	Principles of Public Relations Public Relations Campaigns Public Relations Case Studies Public Relations Writing
Mississippi College	COM 5443 - Public Relations COM 5444 - Practices in Public Relations

Alcorn State University	CO 241 - Public Relations Principles & Practices CO 461 - Public Relations Campaigns
University of Mississippi	IMC 391: Public Relations IMC 491: Public Relations Techniques IMC 492: Public Relations Case Problems
Mississippi University of Women	COM 413 - Public Relations
Mississippi State University	CO 3803 Principles of Public Relations CO 3853 Public Relations Writing CO 3863 PR Production CO 4803 Research in PR *CO 4813 PR in Organizations
Jackson State University	MC 471 Public Relations Practice
Millsaps College	COMM 2200 Public Rhetoric
Rust College	2020FA2 MAC 236 1 Public Relations / Message
East Mississippi Community College	LEA 1911 LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS DEVELOPMENT - RECRUITING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

## REFERENCES

- Abdullah, Z. (2012). Improving educational and professional standards of public relations professionalism: Towards a mixed-methods research approach. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 6(2), 109-124.  
doi:10.5172/mra.2012.6.2.109
- Albers, M. J. (2017). Quantitative Data Analysis—In the Graduate Curriculum. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 47(2), 215–233. doi:  
10.1177/0047281617692067
- Auger, G. A., & Cho, M. (2014). A Comparative Analysis of Public Relations Curricula. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 71(1), 50-68.  
doi:10.1177/1077695814551830
- Babbie, E. R. (1998). *The practice of social research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co.
- Bhowmik, M., Banerjee (Roy), B., & Banerjee, J. (2013). The Role of Pedagogy in Effective Teaching. *Basic Research Journal of Education Research and Review*, 2 (1), 01–05. Retrieved from <http://www.basicresearchjournals.org/>
- Boudreaux, J. (2005). *A Quantitative Assessment of Public Relations Practitioners' Perceptions of Their Relationship with the Organization They Represent* (Master's thesis, University of South Florida, 2005) (pp. 1-125). Tampa: Jill Boudreaux.
- Brown, K. A., White, C., & Waymer, D. (2011). African American students' perceptions of public relations education and practice: Implications for minority recruitment. *Public Relations Review*, 37(5), 522-529.  
doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.09.017

- Brunner, Brigitta. (2005). Linking diversity and public relations in higher education. *PRism Online PR Journal*.
- Bush, L. (2009). Student Public Relations Agencies: A Qualitative Study of the Pedagogical Benefits, Risks, and a Framework for Success. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 64(1), 27-38. doi:10.1177/107769580906400103
- CPRE. (2018). *Fast Forward: Foundations plus Future State. Educators plus Practitioners* (pp. 4-163, Rep.). New York, NY: Commission on Public Relations. The Commission on Public Relations Education 2017 Report on Undergraduate Education
- Coombs, W., & Rybacki, K. (1999). Public relations education: Where is pedagogy? *Public Relations Review*, 25(1), 55-63. doi:10.1016/s0363-8111(99)80127-1
- Cutlip, S. M. (1994). *The unseen power: public relations, a history*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Associates.
- DiStaso, M. W., Stacks, D. W., & Botan, C. H. (2009). State of public relations education in the United States: 2006 report on a national survey of executives and academics. *Public Relations Review*, 35(3), 254–269. doi: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.03.006
- Erzikova, E. (2009). *Acumen.lib.ua.edu. acumen.lib.ua.edu*.
- Fingerson, L. & Culley, A. (2001). *Collaborators in teaching and learning: Undergraduate teaching assistants in the classroom. Teaching Sociology*, 29(3), 299-315.

- Freberg, K., Remund, D., & Keltner-Previs, K. (2013). Integrating evidence-based practices into public relations education. *Public Relations Review*, 39(3), 235-237. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.03.005
- Gale, K., & Bunton, K. (2005). Assessing the Impact of Ethics Instruction on Advertising and Public Relations Graduates. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 60(3), 272-285. doi:10.1177/107769580506000306
- Geyer-Sempe, V. (2012). Through classroom walls: A collaborative public relations education for Creating Integrated Digital Media Campaigns. *Communication Teacher*, 26(1), 37-44.
- Glaser, P. (2012). Respondents Cooperation: Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents and Its Implication. *Handbook of Survey Methodology for the Social Sciences*, 195-207. doi:10.1007/978-1-4614-3876-2\_12
- Gibson, D.C. (1987). Public relations education in a time of change: Suggestions for academic relocation and renovation. *Public Relations Quarterly*, Fall 1987, (25-31).
- Gonçalves, G., Spínola, S. D., & Padamo, C. (2013). Analyzing public relations education through international standards: The Portuguese case. *Public Relations Review*, 39(5), 612-614. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.07.020
- Gurung, R. A. R., & Schwartz, B. M. (2013). *Optimizing teaching and learning: practicing pedagogical research*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, a John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication.

- Hardin, M. C., & Pompper, D. (2004). Writing in the public relations curriculum: Practitioner perceptions versus pedagogy. *Public Relations Review*, 30(3), 357-364. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2004.05.007
- Interviewee 20-100-01. Strengths and Weaknesses in Mississippi Public Relations Education [Phone interview]. (2020, September 10).
- Interviewee 20-100-05. Strengths and Weaknesses in Mississippi Public Relations Education [Phone interview]. (2020, September 15).
- Interviewee 20-100-09. Strengths and Weaknesses in Mississippi Public Relations Education [E-mail interview]. (2020, September 21).
- Interviewee 20-100-10. Strengths and Weaknesses in Mississippi Public Relations Education [E-mail interview]. (2020, September 22).
- Jacques, A. (2009). How social media is moving into PR classrooms: And do the students know more than the professors? *Public Relations TACTICS*. Retrieved from [www.prsa.org](http://www.prsa.org). Retrieved: December 10, 2017
- Johnson, M. A. (1997). Public Relations and Technology: Practitioner Perspectives. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9(3), 213–236. doi: 10.1207/s1532754xjpr0903\_02
- Kang, J. (2010). Ethical conflict and job satisfaction of public relations practitioners. *Public Relations Review*, 36(2), 152-156. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.11.001
- Landis, K. (n.d.). The Public Relations Industry Is Too White, and the Solution Starts with Higher Education. *Insight Into Diversity*. Retrieved from



<https://www.insightintodiversity.com/the-public-relations-industry-is-too-white-and-the-solution-starts-with-higher-education/>

Marston, J. E. (n.d.). The nature of public relations. Retrieved from  
<https://www.worldcat.org/title/nature-of-public-relations/oclc/255556>

Motion, J., & Burgess, L. (2013). Transformative learning approaches for public relations pedagogy. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 33(3), 523-533.  
doi:10.1080/07294360.2013.832163

*Public Relations Education for the 21st Century: A Port of Entry 1999 Commission on Public Relations Education, 10/1999* (Rep. No. 6I-1999). (2007). Public Relations Society of America.

PR Institute SCORE – India (2017). What PR education today  
needs. <http://scoreindia.org/about.html> Retrieved: December 10, 2017

Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to Identify Themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X02239569>

Sansing, D. G. (1990). *Making haste slowly: The troubled history of higher education in Mississippi*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Shorser, Lauren. "Why Do Scientists Research the Seemingly Obvious?" Blog post.  
2013.

Somerville, I., Purcell, A., & Morrison, F. (2011). Public relations education in a divided society: PR, terrorism, and critical pedagogy in post-conflict Northern Ireland. *Public Relations Review*, 37(5), 548-555. doi:  
10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.09.008

- Smith, R. (2011) "Pioneers in Public Relations," Strategic Planning for Public Relations. Routledge/Taylor and Francis. Retrieved from <http://facstaff.buffalostate.edu/smithrd/PR/pioneers.htm>, December 19, 2016.
- Stacks, D. W., Botan, C., & Turk, J. V. (1999). Perceptions of public relations education. *Public Relations Review*, 25(1), 9-28. doi:10.1016/s0363-8111(99)80124-6
- Strait, J., & Jones, J. (2008). Each One, Teach One: A methodological approach for national disaster school response. *International Journal on School Disaffection*, 6(2), 9–16. doi: 10.18546/ijsd.06.2.03
- Toth, E. L. (2009). Diversity and Public Relations. *Institute for Public Relations*. Retrieved February 21, 2016, from <http://www.instituteforpr.org/diversity-and-pr-practice/>
- Turner, D. W. (2010). Qualitative Interview Design: A Practical Guide for Novice Investigators. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 754-760. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol15/iss3/19>
- U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, (2018). Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/public-relations-specialists.htm>
- VanCamp, J. A. (2006). *A Case Study on How Universities in West South Center States That Offer Baccalaureate Programs in Public Relations Prepare Graduates to Manage Crisis Communications Situations Once They Enter Their*

*Professions* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2005) (pp. 1-112).

Ann Arbor, Michigan: ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

Watson, T., & Noble, P. (2007). *Evaluating public relations: a best practice guide to public relations planning, research & evaluation*. London: Kogan Page.

Welch, Mary, Ph.D. "Time to Reinvent the Wheel for PR Education." Blog post. *Institute for PR*. Web. 27 Jan. 2020.

White, C., & Park, J. (2010). Public perceptions of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 36(4), 319-324. doi: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.09.002