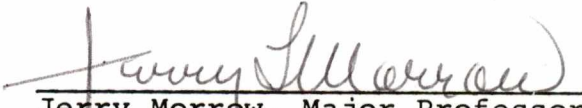


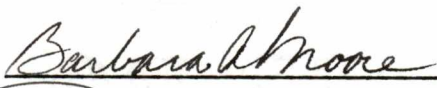
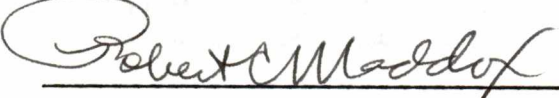
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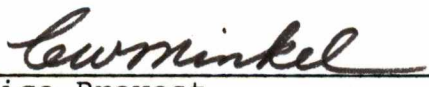
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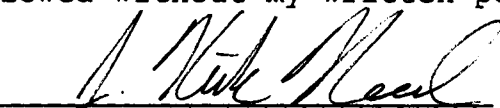

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STUDENT-RUN PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCIES:
AN OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR OPERATIONS

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

John Kirk Neal

March 1987

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ABSTRACT

This study examines student-run public relations agencies associated with the Public Relations Student Society of America and makes recommendations for their operations. The study was conducted because little information is available on the operations of these agencies.

Data were collected through a mail survey of PRSSA chapter faculty advisers conducted in the summer of 1986 and telephone interviews with four selected advisers, and Brian Hujdich, immediate past president of PRSSA, conducted in the fall of that year.

Of 136 questionnaires mailed to PRSSA chapter advisers, 28 were completed and returned, indicating that these chapters had agencies. The agencies were diverse in their operations. Most of the agencies were closely tied to the local PRSSA chapter. Most charged fees, but also accepted some no-fee accounts.

Most agencies (96.4%) had faculty advisers and 39.2% had professional advisers. Agency members and officers were most often chosen by vote. Only 23% said their members were paid, most respondents saying the experience was much more important than any monetary reward. Most agencies also practiced some kind of evaluation.

Using the data collected, a number of recommendations were made on agency operations. It was concluded that fees should be charged, the agencies should work closely with local professionals, should be tied to the local PRSSA chapter but have separate bank accounts. Work should be found for all those students who want it, but they should first go through an interview process. Officers should be chosen by the adviser with the recommendations of agency members. If possible, agency members should be paid. Evaluations should be done by advisers, clients and agency members.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Student-run public relations agencies are among the fastest growing segments in public relations education. By October 1986, about one-third of the 136 Public Relations Student Society of America chapters had agencies, but it was estimated that about one-half will have agencies by the end of 1986 (B. Hujdich, personal communication, Sept. 23, 1986).

Since there is a large number of agencies spread out geographically and there are no set guidelines for agency operations, it would be expected that different agencies would operate in a myriad of ways. This study will attempt to investigate the differences and similarities among the agencies contacted.

Differences among student-run public relations agencies are numerous. The national committee of PRSSA has set up a task force to attempt to establish some operating guidelines for student-run agencies. Brian Hujdich, the immediate past president of the PRSSA national committee, said, "We don't want to go in and set up an agency for a school. We just want to let those people who are

starting an agency know how other people are doing things."*

This study was initially undertaken because no basic research on student-run public relations agencies could be found. This study seeks to recommend the best ways to operate student-run public relations agencies of PRSSA. Questionnaire responses from student-run agency advisers have been coupled with the comments of four agency faculty advisers and Hujdich to produce a data-base of information on agency operations. Recommendations were made on the best methods of agency operations, based on the information gathered. The recommendations and reporting of other agencies' operations practices should help this segment of public relations education by giving others information they could use to set up or improve an agency.

Purpose of Student-Run Agencies

Nearly all descriptions say that the agencies provide an opportunity for students to put to use the skills they have learned in the classroom. But other people offer different insights.

Hujdich said, "It gives students the chance to learn how to solve problems, to improve their writing, to learn about budgeting."

*Information from Robert Bishop, Brian Hujdich, John Ludlum, Melvin Sharpe and Gay Wakefield came from personal telephone interviews. See Bibliography Addendum.

Robert Bishop, faculty adviser for the University of Georgia, said, "We're here to provide some public service while giving students a chance at practical experience and a chance to build up their resume."

Gay Wakefield, faculty adviser at Southern Illinois University, said, "All of that (purpose of an agency) depends on where the university's located. We want to get the students experience and help them develop professionally in order that they can come out of college with experience."

"But we are in a town of about 50,000 people so we like to think that we are also serving the community. There is a void of professional public relations people in the area and, besides, a lot of people in the area just can't afford professional public relations people anyway. So we just provide an affordable service."

Comparison to Student-Run Newspapers

Among student-operated organizations, student-run newspapers most closely parallel student public relations agencies. Many student newspapers operate independently of their schools, but some operate with student subsidies or with funds from the university or college itself (Mencher, 1970). Does this parallel student-run agencies or are most agencies self-supporting, receiving little campus funds?

Mencher (1970) said that the newspaper adviser should be an instructor-critic, serving not as a censor but as a critic of what is published. He also said that the adviser should be an outside professional, not a faculty member who is a part of the school and would thus try to sway the students toward favorable coverage.

The election of student newspaper editors by the student body or groups (such as the newspaper staff) has been criticized by Mencher (1970), since that could make the editor less critical of that group. This may apply to student agencies.

Though students newspapers probably more closely resemble student agencies than any other organization, the groups are at the same time quite different. Student newspapers don't generally do work off-campus. Though they are working within the field they may be entering upon graduation, student newspaper workers are independent, and often are working in a sheltered campus society.

Student public relations practitioners are serving clients, whether school departments or outside organizations, and the students must answer directly to those clients if there is a problem. This distinction is a major difference between student-run newspapers and agencies. Agency members must deal with professionals, professionals they may want to work for again. If the public relations

practitioner makes a mistake, he may not get that client again.

Scope of the Research

A wide variety of questions dealing with the operations of a student-run public relations agency were asked on the questionnaire. Upon receipt and initial analysis of returned questionnaires, some items showed interesting patterns and appeared to be more important to the respondents. It was decided that these items would be used as the focal points of the interviews and analysis.

The important issues were:

- fees charged;
- agencies' advisers' qualifications;
- agencies' relationship with local public relations professionals;
- relationship of the agency to local chapter;
- selection of members and officers of the agency;
- payment of agency members;
- evaluations done on work; and
- agency structures.

These are some of the most pressing issues confronting student agencies. Other basic factual information on size of agencies, amount of billings and types of work done was included.

It was expected that there would be much dissimilar information collected. Each agency is different, as is each PRSSA chapter and each college or university. The major reason for the dissimilarity is that there are no general guidelines for forming a student-run public relations agency. Each agency has developed individually, taking whatever form seemed best to its founders.

With the information gathered from questionnaire responses and telephone interviews, conclusions will be drawn about which form is best for a student-run public relations agency. In this way, this study will attempt to establish guidelines that may help those colleges or universities wishing to start their own student-run agency, or make an existing agency more effective.

It is important for the public relations profession to have student-run agencies operating effectively in order to provide better qualified individuals to the field. A poorly run agency could turn a student away from a career in public relations, while a well-run agency could make him more likely to enter it following graduation.

Chapter II is a review of literature on student-run public relations agencies, Chapter III relates the methodology used in this research. Chapter IV contains the results of the research, while Chapter V gives

recommendations on agency operations. Chapter VI offers some conclusions.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was conducted because little, if any, information was available on student-run public relations agencies. There was no organized body of knowledge on such agencies. What little information was available was contained in the brochures and pamphlets of the agencies themselves. This study was an attempt to put together an organized body of information on the operations of student-run agencies.

The standard public relations literature was reviewed, including Public Relations Journal, Public Relations Review and Journalism Quarterly. None of these yielded any information about student-run agencies, and an extensive library search likewise yielded no information on the topic.

The pamphlets and brochures as listed in Chapter III were helpful in relating the questionnaire responses to actual practices in agencies. Pamphlets from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville--Campus Practitioners (1985) and from Limited Edition of Ball State University (1986) were especially helpful. Both of these pamphlets offered extensive information on the operations of their

respective agencies, giving detailed information that could not be obtained from a questionnaire.

Both included information on organization and structure, job descriptions, the selection process and responsibilities of students, and evaluations done by students, advisers and clients. The Campus Practitioners brochure also included account summaries.

"Guidelines to Organizing Your Student-Run Public Relations Agency," by Susan Buckley (1983), offered some help. It was the only available literature on setting up an agency, but the recommendations were not supported by research.

In essence, Buckley's paper merely related how the agency at one particular school operated. No research was done to determine how other agencies were operating, so it is difficult to accept the recommendations as valid. The fact that Buckley's paper was the only available literature on student-run agency guidelines made the research conducted for this paper seem much more viable and needed.

The Student Newspaper (Isaacs et al., 1970), published by the American Council on Education, gave some interesting information on the operations of the student-run agencies' counterparts in journalism. Chapter IV, "The College Newspaper," by Melvin Mencher (1970) was especially helpful. However, this book was published in 1970 and is dated.

The College Media Advisers group provided information on college newspapers. Information on pay for college newspaper employees from "Salaries are the Norm for Student Newspaper Staffs," by Kopenhaver and Spielberger (undated), was used.

Several good public relations textbooks exist, including Effective Public Relations by Cutlip and Center (1978), Managing Public Relations by Grunig and Hunt (1984), and Lesly's Public Relations Handbook (Lesly, 1983). All are good books on public relations basics and principles. But none of the books give details on agency organization since there are as many different ways of agency operations as there are agencies.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Two methods were used to gather information for this overview of student-run agencies. A mail questionnaire was sent to agency advisers and telephone interviews were conducted with selected advisers.

Questionnaire

A mail questionnaire was sent to faculty advisers of 136 Public Relations Student Society of America chapters. The names and addresses were obtained from the national PRSSA office.

The advisers were chosen as the population to be contacted since their names and addresses were the most easily available through the PRSSA list. The advisers also were the most knowledgeable about the subject since most had been involved with the agency for some length of time, unlike student agency directors, who changed periodically. It was assumed that advisers of student-run agencies would be moderately interested in this research due to their involvement with the subject and would take the time to complete and return the questionnaire.

A limitation of the mail questionnaire method is the possibility of a low response rate. To encourage

responses, those surveyed were offered a summary of the study results if they returned the questionnaire and requested the results (see Appendix D).

The questionnaire consisted of 40 questions on three sheets of paper, two of which were front and back, plus a cover sheet (see Appendix A). Seventeen questions required yes or no responses, thirteen required marking responses about practices conducted by the agency. Four were Likert scale questions; one question concerned agency structure; and the remainder were fill-in-the-blank.

The questions covered eight major areas--fees charged, advisers' qualifications, relationship with local professionals, relationship of the agency to the PRSSA chapter, selection of agency members and officers, payment of agency members, evaluations of work and agency structures. Other questions on types of work done and agency size also were asked.

Those schools that did not have student-run agencies were asked to mail the questionnaire back not filled out. The questionnaires were mailed Monday, July 14, 1986. They were mailed with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope. A follow-up postcard was mailed two weeks later to remind the recipients to return the questionnaire if they had not yet done so (see Appendix A). The questionnaires were marked with a number in order

to keep track of the ones returned and to help in determining who to contact for telephone interviews.

Manuals and brochures from several agencies were returned with the questionnaire and provided much help in the information gathering. A manual detailing the operations of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville--Campus Practitioners (1985) was helpful in giving the research direction. An in-depth operations manual from Limited Edition (1986), Ball State University's agency, provided much information on a large (about 20-25 members), healthy, operating agency. A brochure from Boston University (undated) also provided more in-depth information.

Telephone Interviews

Once the questionnaires were returned, a list of questions was developed to pose to some advisers and to Brian Hujdich, immediate past president of the national PRSSA. The questionnaire responses that showed interesting patterns or appeared to be most important to the respondents were used to focus the interviews. The questions asked for elaboration of items included on the mail questionnaire.

Four agency advisers and Hujdich were contacted and asked a series of questions concerning how their agencies operated. The advisers chosen were from agencies

that differed in both operations and size. Hujdich was chosen since he is quite knowledgeable about student-run agencies and worked closely with them as president of PRSSA.

The questionnaire responses that showed interesting patterns or appeared most important to the respondents were used to focus the interviews. The interviews were conducted to obtain a deeper understanding of how some agency advisers felt about the issues included in the mail questionnaire.

The advisers interviewed were Robert Bishop of the University of Georgia, John Ludlum of Otterbein College, Melvin Sharpe of Ball State University and Gay Wakefield of Southern Illinois University.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of 136 questionnaires mailed out, 57 (41.9%) were returned. Of the 57 returned questionnaires, 28 (20.5%) were returned filled out, indicating that these chapters had agencies. This high return rate was probably because the subject held much interest for the respondents and a short summary of the research was promised for those requesting it (see Appendix D).

This chapter will individually discuss each of the eight major question areas of the research. Readers should remember that there were 28 questionnaires with responses, but not all respondents answered each question. Also, some questions could be answered with more than one response. Consult Appendix A for a sample copy of the questionnaire with response totals, and Appendix B for a raw data chart of individual responses.

Fees Charged

Questions 2, 3, 4 and 5 dealt with fees charged, no-fee accounts and the rate structure for paid accounts. Twenty-three of 28 (82.1%) reported fees were charged, and 21 of 27 (77.7%) reported doing no-fee accounts. So

apparently most agencies had a mix of paid and no-fee accounts.

The majority of no-fee accounts (14 or 66.6%) were done for not-for-profit groups, while some agencies did work for those clients that couldn't afford to pay. The clients that couldn't afford to pay were often not-for-profit groups.

At least one agency was not allowed by the college or university administration to charge for any work done, while five agencies did no-fee work for school or university clients. Several respondents said that the value of the work for the student was considered for each account regardless of whether fees could be charged. Some said that no-fee accounts were handled as a class project.

Three of the agencies charging fees charged less than \$2 an hour; two charged \$2-4 an hour; five, \$4-6 an hour; four, \$6-8 an hour; and five charged more than \$8 an hour. However, five agencies asked a one-time charge which ranged from a \$25 donation up to \$500 per semester. One respondent said that not-for-profit clients paid \$25 per semester while other clients paid an hourly rate based on the kind of work performed. Some of the respondents computed their flat fee to an hourly rate for the questionnaire.

Hujdich said, "If agencies are not billing they are missing a big part of the agency experience. Budgeting

is a major part of agency work." He added that employees are looking for public relations people with experience in billing and budgeting.

"We charge at least a retainer fee of \$25 dollars for everything we do, including work for non-profit groups," said Wakefield. "Twenty-five dollars for a semester of work is nothing."

Wakefield's agency charged profit clients on a by-the-job contract basis, on average about \$10 an hour. "I think having the agency set up with a profit orientation pushes the students to be more creative," she said.

However, Ludlum said, "If students are interested in an account and we think they can get something out of it, we'll do it regardless of whether we get paid. Most times the free ones offer better experience than the paid ones. The paid ones want you to do gritty work, just things like posters. You aren't able to be as creative on the paid accounts as you are on the unpaid ones."

Ludlum's agency was located at a small college and most of its work was for campus departments. "Half of our work is free," he said, "or tremendously underpriced."

Bishop said that all of his agency's work was done free of charge. "The parent organization (local chapter of PRSSA) doesn't allow us to work on paid accounts. I have urged them to charge fees." He said that mainly

the agency was set up to offer a public service and give students experience.

Sharpe's agency charged a flat fee for profit accounts. "We look at our resources before we accept an account. We need to know if we will be able to handle it well before we accept it," he said.

Most of the agencies responding did charge fees for some of their clients but also accepted some no-fee accounts. Most of the no-fee accounts were done for not-for-profit groups. The majority of respondents that broke their rate structure down into an hourly rate charged \$4-6 an hour or more than \$8 an hour; not too expensive, but still not giving the work away.

Advisers' Qualifications

Questions 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 dealt with whether the agency has an adviser, whether he is a member of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), whether he is employed by the college or university and in what capacity, and whether he is an accredited public relations professional.

Twenty-seven (96.4%) of the 28 agencies responding had an adviser. Twenty-five (92.5%) of the 27 were members of PRSA. However, one of those who was not a PRSA member was a member of the International Association of Business

Communicators (IABC). All 27 were employed as faculty members by the college or university.

Ten out of 26 respondents (38.4%) were accredited public relations professionals (APR), a designation authorized by PRSA to members who pass an examination on professional practices (Public Relations Society of America Bylaws, 1986). One of the 16 respondents that were not accredited replied that there were two accredited faculty members within the department.

The adviser can play an important part in helping the agency find clients and in encouraging quality work. However, Mencher (1970) said that faculty members of student newspapers may serve as censors for the administration instead of advisers. A student-run agency adviser could serve as an administration censor and not allow the agency to serve a client due to criticism from the college or university.

Ludlum and Bishop both said that it was important for advisers to be PRSA members so that contacts with local public relations professionals would be open if advice was needed by the agency. Wakefield said it was important that the advisers be professionally active, and should be PRSA members.

The subject of accreditation is somewhat controversial regardless of whether the subject is student-run agency

advisers or public relations professionals in general. One respondent said that merely having the question on the questionnaire was advocating accreditation.

Hujdich said, "There is a move within PRSA to make everybody be accredited." He said that accrediting agency advisers was a long way off, but that the agency and chapter should have an outside professional adviser that was accredited, and that eventually may be required by PRSSA.

It was interesting that 10 out of 26 respondents were accredited, a figure that might please PRSA and PRSSA. Even though accreditation is not yet required for PRSA members or PRSSA agency advisers, a number of advisers were already accredited.

Relationship with Local Professionals

Questions 17, 18 and 19 dealt with the agencies' relationship with local public relations professionals, in what capacity the professionals serve the agency and the strength of the relationship.

Eleven of the 28 respondents (39.2%) said their agency had a relationship with a local public relations professional. In nine (81.8%) of the cases the professionals served as advisers, in two cases they gave help on accounts and in one case they arranged tours for chapter

members. Most agencies that had a relationship with local professionals characterized the relationship as less than good. Two said the relationship was weak, and three said it was somewhat weak. Three said the relationship was good, while two said the relationship was strong.

Most of the advisers interviewed said it was important for the agencies to have some kind of relationship with a local public relations professional. Sharpe said that his agency tried to take a field trip to a professional agency at least once a term. He said the trip was important because it allowed the student "to meet his or her real counterpart in an agency." He said that the professional advisers were available to the students to discuss problems or answer questions.

Bishop said that the professional adviser to his agency sat in on meetings of the PRSSA chapter. Wakefield said, "I think it is important that the adviser be professionally active." She said this included being active in a local PRSA chapter.

Relationship of the Agency to the PRSSA Chapter

Questions 20 and 21 dealt with the relationship between the local Public Relations Student Society of America chapter and the student-run agency. The national PRSSA office has been insistent that the agencies be

a part of the chapters so the national organization can keep up with the agencies' operations.

Twenty-four of the 27 respondents (88.8%) said that their agency was a part or subgroup of the school PRSSA chapter. Twelve of 24 respondents (50%) said that the agency had a bank account separate from the PRSSA chapter.

Hujdich said, "It's important for the chapter and the agency to be together. If someone joins an agency that's not in a chapter, the person doesn't get anything out of the chapter. And also, the chapter doesn't get anything out of the agency member."

Hujdich said that he knew of one chapter where the agency was viewed as a committee of the chapter. This allowed the chapter to do hands-on work but the work was usually done after meetings and under the auspices of the chapter.

Ludlum said, "The agency is part of the chapter here. A lot of projects are done at the chapter meetings. But I see the agency work as a lot more important to the chapter than vice versa. We use the agency to sell the chapter."

The case of the agency work selling the chapter seemed to be true in many places. Students know that they can get experience by working in the agency. But they can only be in the agency by being a member of the local PRSSA chapter.

"As agencies get more sophisticated, there is an urge for them to break off on their own," said Hujdich. An example he gave is that two people may want to be director or president of a chapter's agency. One person could decide to break off and form his own independent agency. Theoretically, this would mean that there could be two (or more) student agencies on a single campus; one operated by PRSSA, the other operated independently. Both would be competing for the same clients.

Selection of Agency Members and Officers

Questions 22 and 23 dealt with the selection of agency members and officers.

Sixteen of 26 respondents (61.5%) said that all students who applied for work as agency members were taken. Ten respondents (38.4%) said agency officers selected members, seven (26.9%) said advisers selected, six (23%) said a selection committee selected.

Most agencies tried to find work for all those students who wanted to work. However, many of the same agencies that took all who applied also said that the applicants must meet with a selection committee, usually made up of the adviser and the previous year's officers. The meeting gives the directors of the agency a chance to determine an applicant's strengths and weaknesses before

he comes to work, so he can be given work with the appropriate degree of difficulty.

In some cases requirements must be met before the student is accepted for agency work while in others agency work was itself a class requirement. One respondent said that all PRSSA members were agency members.

Seventeen of 23 respondents (73.9%) said that agency officers were selected by a vote of the members. Eight said the adviser chose the officers, four said it was done by out-going officers.

"There should be no requirement for experience in a student agency," said Hujdich. "A specific account might need a senior person, but brainstorming sessions with younger students can often yield some good results. Telling them they aren't good enough to work in the agency might discourage them from going into the field."

"Where do you draw the line?" said Wakefield. "Who says who can and can't do the work? We find a place for everybody that wants to work. It may not always be what they want, but there needs to be someplace within the organizations for everyone that wants to work."

Bishop said, "We try to use anybody that wants to help out. The account executive needs to be a strong person but we try to let sophomores and juniors help out and maybe they'll be strong next year."

However, some agencies at larger schools told a different story. "We have too many public relations students to herd them all down here," said Sharpe. "Our agency is made up of a selected group. We go through a careful selection process. We want them to know we're serious about this, so we conduct interviews just like you encounter for a job. We feel we're a lot better off to have individuals that are really committed and that we can be sure will uphold their responsibilities."

"We try to keep it on as professional a level as possible," Sharpe added. "But if a student is persistent, he or she can work their way into the agency." He said, however, that all public relations students at his school were required to do a practicum or internship and were able to get professional experience in that way if turned down for agency work.

Most agencies chose their officers by vote, which may not be a good practice. In talking about student newspapers, Mencher (1970) said that election of editors by the staff "can encourage control of the newspaper by cliques." He implied that the election of student newspaper editors by the staff could become a popularity contest, making the elected editor less critical of the electors' bad work.

Payment of Agency Members

Questions 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28 dealt with the payment of agency members and what happens to money made from accounts.

Six out of 26 respondents (23%) said that agency members were paid. Three of 13 (23%) said that all employees were paid, so one must assume that about half of those agencies paying employees were paying all employees. One respondent said only agency officers were paid.

Pay rates for students were non-hourly for all respondents. One respondent reported that students were paid 10 to 20 percent of each job's fee while two reported that employees were paid a set amount per term.

In those agencies where students were not paid, the money from accounts was spent on a variety of things. Twelve of 25 (48%) said the money was spent on trips; ten on equipment (35.7%); nine (36%) on rent and other expenses; and eight (32%) on parties. Other things that money was reportedly spent on included supplies, professional development, scholarships, and school betterment which included buying books for a campus resource center. Some agencies only charged enough money to cover expenses while some gave all money to the PRSSA chapter.

"Students should be getting enough out of the agency experience that they don't need to be paid," said Hujdich.

"Any money that is being made should be put into the chapter to send people to conventions and to go on educational trips. The idea is to get experience and if they start paying members they will have to do something else to raise money." Hujdich said he knew of one agency that was forced to sell candy to pay the bills, something a billing organization should not have to do.

Ludlum said, "I tend to support some kind of profit-sharing system for the agency. But my bias is that pay is not essential, that the experience is what's important."

"We recognize that certain individuals are going to have to spend a lot of time on agency work," said Sharpe. "We do give a reward for that kind of commitment." At his school the agency officers received scholarships of \$400 to \$600 per term, dependent on the ability of the agency. The scholarship money was deducted from the student's tuition bill. He added that the agency expected to be able to offer account executives some money in the coming year.

"We're not to the point where we have enough money to pay students," said Wakefield. "Besides, the number one priority should be academic and experience." At her school, agency members earned one hour of communications credit for each 45 hours of agency work.

Wakefield said that if students were paid an hourly wage a problem could occur if students spent too much

time doing agency work. "Some students have a tendency to spend far too much time in agency work anyway and if they were getting paid it might make that situation worse," she said. "If we see somebody getting in trouble in school because of the agency, we let them know they're spending too much time on it."

Evaluations of Work

Questions 31, 32 and 33 dealt with whether evaluations are done, who does the evaluations and if there is a standard evaluation form.

Twenty-six out of 27 respondents (96.2%) said that the agency evaluated work after it was completed. Twenty-two of 26 (84.6%) said clients evaluated work; 20 (76.9%), the adviser; 15 (57.6%), agency members; 15, agency officers; 7 (26.9%), outside professionals; and one said a professional advisory board evaluated work. In many of the agencies, several of the aforementioned evaluated work done.

Only six of 26 agencies (23%) had a standard evaluation form. But several respondents who did not thought standard evaluations were a good idea to use as a basis of comparison.

Sharpe said that evaluations on agency work could go into a student's academic files if the student so requests. Bishop stated that his agency's clients wrote

evaluation letters for all work completed. However, Ludlum said his smaller agency practiced a "type of informal evaluation since most of our work is busy work like making posters or writing for newsletters."

Agency Structure

Question 40 asked for diagrams of agency organizational structure.

By far the most common structure had an agency director at the top, sometimes called an executive director or account coordinator. Often, immediately below the director was an assistant director. This was then followed by account executives and agency members or staff.

Sometimes included in the structure were the faculty adviser and a professional advisory board. The PRSSA chapter president sometimes served as president of the agency. Other titles within the structures reported included operations director, office supervisor and marketing director.

Other Areas

The agencies were doing many different types of work. All (28) were doing brochures and press releases. Most were doing overall public relations plans (24) and newsletters (22). Many were also doing slide shows (20),

displays (21), photography (18), advertising (13) and communications audits (13). Other work included fund raisers, surveys, speech writing and event planning.

Work was done for many different clients. By far the most popular were charitable organizations (24) and university or college departments (23). Social and professional clubs were next (17), then retailers and hospitals (both 10) and manufacturers (9). Other clients included sports teams, museums and government agencies.

Word-of-mouth advertising was most popular for student-run agencies and most clients were referred to the agency by other clients (21) or found by solicitation of agency members (19). Eleven agencies had been in existence for more than four years. Four agencies had existed less than one year, four between one and two years, four between two and three years and five between three and four years.

Most agencies did all of their writing (27), editing (26) and layout (24) in-house. However, some of the larger agencies also did photography (17), darkroom work (10) and printing work (4) in-house. Ten of 23 respondents also did color work.

The agencies received support other than advice mostly from their college or university department (14), but others received support from the university (8) or

college (5). Local business also helped out some (3) while several respondents said that the PRSSA chapter helped (4). Types of support from the aforementioned included office space (19), production equipment (15) and telephone equipment (14). A small portion received money (7).

The average number of accounts at the most active time of the year was 7.14 with a high of 20 and several lows of three. Several agencies had numbers of accounts in the teens while others had between three and ten accounts.

Billing amounts averaged \$2,123.50 per year for those responding, with a high of \$6,000 and low of \$100. Eleven of 17 respondents reported billings of at least \$1,000 per year.

The amount of profit averaged \$960 per year, a figure which is not representative because several respondents reported the same amount for both profit and billings. But many of the respondents reported a healthy amount of profit, ten reporting between \$200 and \$1,000 annually.

The average number of agency members was 25.2, with a high of 60 and a low of 5. Many agencies with higher member numbers said that not all were active. Often all PRSSA members were included in the agency member count.

CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section will review what was found in each area and recommend some procedures to be followed in operating a student-run public relations agency.

Fees Charged

Most of the agencies responding charged fees for some of the work they do. But most also did a large amount of free work for not-for-profit clients or those clients that could not afford to pay for the work.

The agencies used a variety of fee structures; some charged an hourly rate, others charged by the job. Some charged a nominal fee for all work done.

Agencies should charge fees. As Hujdich said, a large part of the experience of working in an agency is learning to budget money. Without billing, agency members are not able to see anything tangible for the work that they are doing. One interviewee said that having a profit orientation makes agency members more creative. And the fees can help defray expenses for the agency, allowing it to pay its own way.

While the agency should be charging fees, it also could be doing some no-fee work. Not-for-profit organizations

need public relations help and, as some of the interviewees suggested, are very appreciative of any free work done for them.

The number one priority in selecting an account should be what the agency members will receive from working on it. It is important for agencies to find accounts that offer a good experience for the students, whether they are paid or unpaid.

Advisers' Qualifications

Most agencies had advisers. All advisers were faculty members and most were members of PRSA. Quite a few were accredited members of PRSA (APR).

Agencies should have advisers. A more experienced person is often necessary to smooth out the rough places in transactions with clients.

The advisers should be faculty members. Faculty members are much more available to students than outside people. They can also help the agency in dealings with the university or college administration or the academic department.

The advisers should be members of PRSA, if the agency is a part of the local PRSSA chapter. As PRSA members, the advisers can line up professional advisers from the local PRSA chapter and help organize trips to conventions.

Serving as a liaison between PRSA and the PRSSA chapter and agency is an important function of faculty advisers.

Accreditation for all public relations professionals is a controversial issue. As Hujdich said, eventually PRSA may require all members to be accredited. This researcher is neither an advocate nor opponent of accreditation and therefore will make no decision of whether advisers should be accredited.

One item suggested by one of the advisers interviewed is the need for advisers to have professional experience or be professionally active. It is very important for advisers to have professional experience they can use to relate what the agency or student is doing to the professional world. Preparing the agency members for the real world is what agencies are all about.

Relationship with Local Professionals

Many of the student-run agencies had a working relationship with local public relations professionals. Mostly they served as advisers but in some cases they offered help on accounts. Most said the relationships were less than strong, however.

It is important for agencies to have some kind of relationship with local public relations professionals. A public relations professional that can be called on

for advice can give students more confidence in their agency work. Student agencies should also try to have some kind of advisory board, made up of local professionals, to sit in on meetings whenever possible and offer advice.

The professionals can give advice in the preparation of accounts but perhaps more importantly, refer some business to the student agency. Often a professional agency has some work that it cannot afford to do because of the work's low profit margin and the agency's high overhead. The professional agency is often willing to refer this kind of low-profit work to a student-run agency.

It is also important for the agency to have a good relationship with professionals so that the professionals will not think that they are competing with students for clients. Much can be learned from experienced public relations professionals and student agencies should befriend them, not try to compete with them.

Jobs are perhaps the most important reason for student agencies to foster a relationship with local professionals. Public relations professionals know where the jobs in the field are and if they have seen a person's work in a student agency they may very well recommend that person for the job. One purpose of student-run agencies is to gain experience to more easily enter the work force, and getting to know the people in the work force before entering it can help.

Relationship of the Agency to the PRSSA Chapter

Most agencies were a part or subgroup of the chapter and half of those responding had separate bank accounts from the chapter.

It's important for the agency to be a part of the chapter. The agency is able to benefit from the activities of the Public Relations Student Society of America, whether it be from newsletters or conventions. Through these activities the agency member is able to learn about career development and better ways to do things.

However, it is also important that the agency be a separate business entity from the chapter, so that the chapter will not have control over the agency. The agency should operate as a separate business entity where the chapter members can gain much needed experience. A strong agency can attract people to the chapter, making both stronger.

The agency should have a separate bank account. The agency's money should be controlled by the agency and should not be spent by the chapter. A large number of people should not benefit from the work of a few. Money earned by the agency should not be spent by the chapter; it should be put back into the agency or used for the benefit of agency members. However, if all chapter

members are agency members, it may be suitable for the chapter to have control of the money.

Selection of Agency Members and Officers

Most respondents tried to find work for all those students who applied to the student-run agency, but for some agencies the number was too great to give everyone work. Most also elected their officers by vote of agency members.

Student-run agencies should try to give work to all those students who want to work. It is the duty of the agency not to discourage public relations students by telling them they aren't good enough. If work is not immediately available for all, the agency should try to put any extra students on retainer for work at special events or on special projects. They may also be allowed to attend meetings or periodic brainstorming sessions about accounts. It is important to let everyone do some kind of work because the agency may need them next term or next year. More accounts can be accepted as more competent students work in the agency.

All applicants to the agency should have to go through an interview process with a selection committee, made up of the adviser and available agency members. The interview process can be very helpful to the student

wishing to gain experience. However, once students become agency members, they should be allowed to remain members without going through the selection process again, barring poor work or attendance.

Criteria should have to be met, however, for each specific title. For upper-level positions, reaching the junior year and having completed core public relations courses could be required, in addition to having proper experience and skills. Other jobs of lesser responsibility would have less strict requirements. But some place should be found for all those who want to work.

The selections for the member positions should be made by the selection committee. Both parties of the committee could participate in the selection; the members because it is their agency and the adviser because of his experience.

However, the adviser, taking into account members' recommendations, should pick the officers. An election by agency members could become a popularity contest. Allowing agency members to select officers could make the officers less critical of the work of other members, hurting the creativity and professionalism of the agency. And other members who were not elected to offices may be more skilled than those who were.

Payment of Agency Members

Most agencies responding were not paying their members. Of responding agencies with compensation, half paid all members and half only paid officers. Most of the people interviewed said that the experience the students get from the agency work should be enough reward without pay. The money was spent on a variety of things, including rent and expenses, supplies, trips, parties, professional development and school betterment projects.

Most student newspaper employees (60 percent) are receiving some salaries (Kopenhaver and Spielberger, undated), so perhaps student-run public relations employees could also be paid. It could happen that the excellent communications students with the skills necessary for unpaid work in a student-run agency could be drawn away to a student newspaper and use the same skills there for paid work. Good writing skills are essential for both jobs, and while the job duties may not be exactly the same the chance to make money could draw the student toward the newspaper.

In order to keep students from leaving the agency for greener (paid) pastures, some form of compensation could exist. If there is a surplus of money from accounts, some type of salary could be paid. This could be in the form of a tuition deduction or perhaps a term stipend.

Many students may tend to spend too many hours on agency work if paid hourly, so hourly pay may not work well. But, students spending more time on agency work should be compensated accordingly.

A form of compensation that many agencies already use is giving course or practicum credit for certain amounts of agency work. This is probably the most easily used and accepted form of compensation. One hour of course work for each 45 hours of agency work is used by Wakefield's agency, and it ensures that all agency members are treated fairly, regardless of their position within the agency.

But agency members should be watched closely to ensure that their class work is not neglected in order to do agency work. A maximum number of hours that can be worked per week, month or term may have to be set in order to keep overwork under control.

After compensation, the money made by the agency should be spent at the discretion of the agency members and adviser(s). Some things money could be spent on include bills, rent, purchasing of supplies and equipment, and sending members to PRSSA conventions. Perhaps speakers could be hired to talk to the agency on topics of interest like handling difficult clients or special problems with accounts, or finding a job. In these ways the agency

members would have something to show for the work they have done. Any leftover money could be spent on an end-of-the-term party.

Evaluations of Work

Most respondents said that their agencies did some form of evaluation, either formal or informal. The evaluators included clients, advisers, agency members and officers, and outside professionals. However, most did not have a standard evaluation form.

Formal evaluation of all work done should take place in every agency. There should be standard evaluation forms to be filled out by the adviser, student and client at the conclusion of each project. The form should detail the project that was done, the types of skills involved in doing the project, the quality of the work done, the professionalism of the student, the problems encountered and what could be done to improve the work of the student. The form could be different for the adviser, student and client as all types of questions may not apply to all.

Having a standard form can give students a basis for comparison of work. The agency and student would both benefit by finding the areas the members most need to work on. The client would benefit by getting improved

service. The student could also use the evaluation forms to show to prospective employers as proof of experience.

Periodically, agency meetings could be held in which all members can gather to critique the work of their fellows. A group can often come up with greater insights than individuals. Professional advisers may also attend these meetings or have meetings of their own to critique the work.

Agency Structure

The typical agency structure of the responding agencies had a director at the top of the chart, usually followed by an assistant director, then several account executives and agency members or staff. This structure can be effective for the student-run agency--it is simple and offers a clear idea of the chain of command.

The structure could include both a faculty and professional adviser. Both can be instrumental in making a good agency and should be a part of the decision-making process whenever possible. They can offer insights into what clients may consider more or less appealing and should be included in all policy decisions. For a sample agency structure, consult Appendix C.

Other Areas

All types of work should be done if the agency has the proper equipment with which to do it. The greater the variety of work a student does, the greater the chance that he will be hired when he graduates. Therefore, any work that offers a worthwhile experience should be undertaken.

The agency should try to deal with different kinds of clients for the same reason. Charitable organizations, university or college departments, social and professional clubs, hospitals, retailers, manufacturers and others all offer different types of experiences. The greater the differences in experience, the better, since agency members should learn to work with people in all walks of life.

If an agency has enough clients to keep everyone in the agency busy, then advertising shouldn't be necessary. However, if a large number of students wish to be active in the agency, some type of advertising could be used to increase the number of clients. Newspaper, television or radio ads could be used, but they may bring large numbers of the wrong kinds of inquiries. Present clients may know of organizations desiring public relations work. And calling on chosen parties by agency members could bring in particular kinds of clients.

Doing as much production work in-house as possible can only benefit students. The more skills they learn (writing, editing, layout, photography, etc.) the more marketable they will be in the job market. If not all steps of a certain area can be carried out in-house, as much as possible should be done there. For instance, if the agency does not have a darkroom the students can still take the pictures and get someone else to develop them. The important thing is to train as many students in as many areas as possible.

Support other than advice should be gained wherever it is available, perhaps in exchange for work. But an agency should be careful not to become the pawn of the college or university administration. Though the agency is a part of the school, it should try to remain as autonomous as possible in its operations.

The number of accounts should equal the number the agency can comfortably handle, giving work to all those who want it, but not overworking students. The number of projects undertaken should not become so large that students' classwork or the quality of the agency's work suffers.

The total amount of billings and the total amount of profit will vary with each agency. And the number of students should be however many want to work.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Further Research

Student-run public relations agencies have not been closely examined. Long-term research needs to be undertaken to determine which agencies with which kinds of operations are strongest and continue to remain viable. Long-term research could also determine which of these recommendations make agencies stronger and which recommendations don't. And it could determine other practices that help or hurt agencies.

In-depth research on student-run agencies' relationships with their clients could be undertaken. What are the students doing that is right or wrong? Are the agencies getting the right kinds of clients and if not, why?

Case-studies of agencies could be undertaken to more closely monitor their operations. A case-study on a faltering agency could help determine what it is doing wrong. This kind of research could more closely identify the problem areas for those schools interested in their own agency.

Closing Remarks

Student-run public relations agencies are a vital part of public relations education. Their rapid growth in numbers continues as more colleges and universities realize the benefits from such programs.

However, there is a wide diversity in opinion of how these agencies should operate. Some charge fees and some don't. Some have professional advisers and some don't. Each agency offers a different kind of experience as does each college or university. But the purpose of this study is not to make clones of all operating student-run agencies.

The recommendations cited previously are simply recommendations; they are not backed by any sanctioning body. However, it is the belief of the researcher that if these recommendations are followed, the student-run agency experience can better prepare the participating students for the world of professional public relations. And that is the chief aim of the student-run agency.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE WITH RESPONSE TOTALS
AND FOLLOW-UP POSTCARD

Dear agency adviser,

Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey on how your student-run public relations agency operates and return it in the enclosed envelope. The information from these surveys will be compiled to establish a database useful for those colleges and universities desiring to begin a student-run agency or for those agencies that wish to know what other student-run agencies are doing. This research is being done as the final requirement for a master of science degree in communications at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Please answer all questions for which you have information. Your name and address will be kept confidential. If you do not have an agency, please return the survey not filled out. If you know of any student-run agencies not affiliated with PRSSA, please let me know. If you desire a summary of the research, please put your return address on the back of the enclosed envelope. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Kirk Neal

Student Agency Survey
(check all applicable responses)

1. Types of work performed:
 - 13 communications audits
 - 20 slide shows
 - 21 displays
 - 28 brochures
 - 22 newsletters
 - 18 photography
 - 28 press releases
 - 24 overall public relations plans
 - 13 advertising
 - other _____
2. Are fees charged for services performed?
23 Yes 5 No
3. Are there any no-fee accounts?
21 Yes 6 No
4. What determines no-fee accounts?
 - 14 non-profit groups
 - 7 ability to pay
 - other _____
5. Rate structure for paid accounts:
 - 3 less than \$2/hour
 - 2 \$2 to \$4/hour
 - 5 \$4 to \$6/hour
 - 4 \$6 to \$8/hour
 - 5 more than \$8/hour
6. For whom is work done?
 - 9 manufacturers
 - 10 retailers
 - 23 university or college departments
 - 10 hospitals
 - 24 charitable organizations
 - 17 social or professional clubs
 - other _____
7. Are there any continuing accounts?
21 Yes 7 No
8. Is advertising used to gain clients?
11 Yes 16 No

9. Types of advertising used?
6 newspaper
4 radio
7 direct mail
0 television
16 word of mouth
 other_____
10. How are clients most often found?
21 referral by other clients
4 answer to advertising
19 solicitation by agency members
 other_____
11. How old is the agency?
4 less than
 1 year
4 1 to 2 years
4 2 to 3 years
5 3 to 4 years
11 more than
 4 years
12. Does the agency have an adviser?
27 Yes 1 No
13. Is the adviser a member of Public Relations Society of America?
25 Yes 2 No
14. Is the adviser employed by the College or University?
27 Yes 0 No
 if no, how employed_____
15. If yes to 14, how is he/she employed?
27 faculty member
0 administrator
 other_____
16. Is the adviser an accredited public relations professional (APR)?
10 Yes 16 No
17. Does the agency have a relationship with any local professional public relations agency?
11 Yes 17 No
18. What is the relationship?
9 serve as advisers
2 help with accounts
0 use of equipment
 other_____

19. Characterize relationship with local agency:
 somewhat somewhat
2 weak 3 weak 3 good 0 strong 2 strong
20. Is your agency a part or subgroup of the school's Public Relations Student Society of America chapter?
 24 Yes 3 No
21. Does the agency have a separate bank account from the PRSSA chapter?
 12 Yes 12 No
22. Who selects agency members?
 6 selection committee of current agency members
 7 adviser
 10 agency officers
 16 take all who apply
 ___ other_____
23. Who selects officers?
 17 vote by members
 8 adviser
 ___ other_____
24. Are student employees paid?
 6 Yes 19 No
25. If yes, are all employees paid?
 3 Yes 10 No
26. If only some are paid, which ones?
 1 officers
 0 account executives
 ___ other_____
27. If students are paid, what is standard pay rate?
 0 less than \$1/hour
 0 \$1 to \$2/hour
 0 \$2 to \$3/hour
 0 \$3 to \$4/ hour
 0 more than \$4/hour
28. If students are not paid, where does money from accounts go?
 8 parties
 12 trips
 9 rent, other expenses
 10 equipment
 ___ other_____

29. Which steps of account preparation are done in-house?
 27 writing
 26 editing
 24 layout
 17 photography
 10 darkroom work
 4 printing
 ___ other_____
30. Does your agency do color work?
 10 Yes 13 No
31. Is work evaluated after it is completed?
 26 Yes 1 No
32. Who evaluates work?
 22 clients
 7 outside public relations professionals
 20 adviser
 15 agency members
 15 agency officers
 ___ other_____
33. Is there a standard evaluation form?
 6 Yes 20 No
34. From what sources other than clients does your agency receive support other than advice?
 8 university
 5 college
 14 department
 3 local business
 ___ other_____
35. What kind of support is received from the above named?
 7 money
 19 office space
 14 telephone equipment
 15 production equipment
 ___ other_____
36. Number of open accounts agency has at most active time of year. (estimate) 7.14 average
37. Amount of billings last year (estimate) \$2123.50 average
38. Amount of profit last year (estimate) \$960 average
39. Number of agency members 25.2 average

40. Please sketch diagram of agency organizational structure.

Any newspaper clippings or other information about your agency you wish to enclose would be greatly appreciated. Any additional comments about your agency or other agencies can be written on the back of the survey.

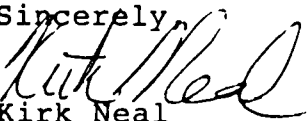
If you desire a copy of the research summary, please put your address on the back of the return envelope.

Thank You Very Much

DID YOU FORGET?

Remember the questionnaire on student-run public relations agencies that you received a couple of weeks ago? If you haven't yet taken a few minutes to fill it out and mail it back, please do so. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Kirk Neal", written over the printed name.

Kirk Neal

APPENDIX B

RAW DATA CHART OF QUESTIONNAIRE
RESPONSES

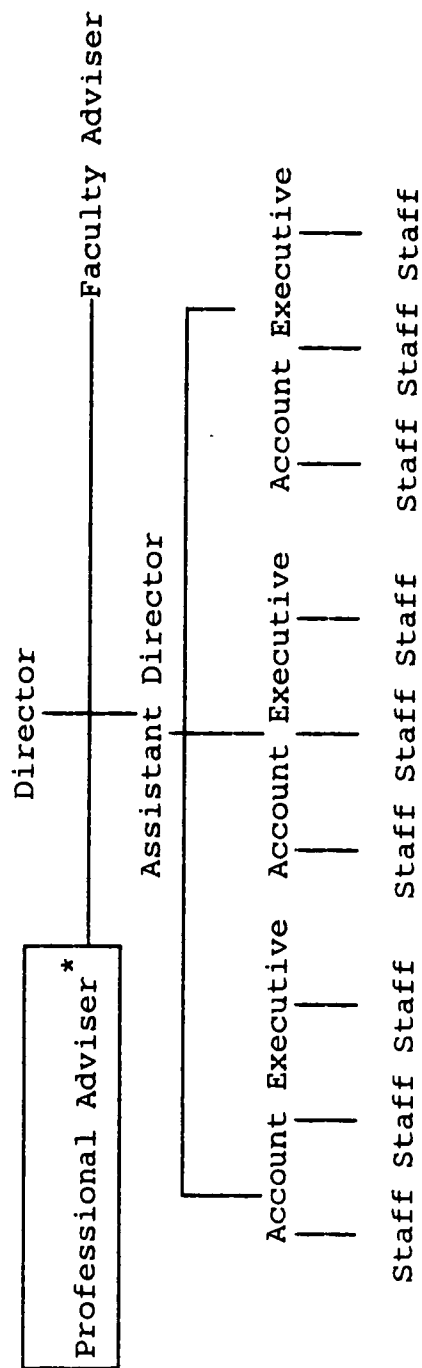
Respondent Number	6	103	49	114	74	93	83	132	116	7	46	8	102	12	125	43	107	115	119	34	21	118	78	15	27	1	26	10	totals
1. Types of work																													13
Comm. Audit																													20
Slide Shows																													21
Displays																													28
Brochures																													22
Advertisements																													18
Photography																													24
Press Releases																													13
Direct Mail																													24
Advertising																													13
Other																													24
2. Fees charged																													23
Yes																													5
No																													21
3. No. Fee																													6
Yes																													21
No																													6
4. No. Fee																													14
Non-Profit																													7
Ability to pay																													14
Other																													7
5. Rate structure																													3
\$20/hr																													3
\$3-44/hr																													2
\$4-46/hr																													5
\$6-58/hr																													4
+88/hr																													5
6. For whom manufactured																													9
Manufacturers																													10
Retailers																													23
Departments																													10
Hospitals																													24
Charities																													17
Social Prof.																													21
Other																													7
7. Cont. Acc.																													16
Yes																													11
No																													7
8. Advertising																													16
Yes																													11
No																													7

[illegible]

APPENDIX C

STUDENT-RUN PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCY

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



*Professional Adviser is optional

APPENDIX D

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations for the operations of student-run public relations agencies taken from a thesis prepared by Kirk Neal, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Fees charged: Agencies should charge fees, but could do some no-fee work. But the main priority for accounts should be the experience students can receive.

Advisers' qualifications: Agencies should have advisers, preferably a faculty member and member of the Public Relations Society of America. Professional experience is also desirable.

Relationship with local professionals: Agencies should have a working advisory relationship with a local public relations professional.

Relationship of the agency to the PRSSA chapter: The agency should be a part of the chapter, but a separate business entity. The agency should have a separate bank account and handle its own money, unless all chapter members are agency members.

Selection of agency members of officers: Agencies should give work to all students who want it. Applicants

should go through an interview process with a selection committee of the adviser and present members. Criteria should be met for specific positions. Taking into account members' recommendations, advisers should pick officers.

Payment of agency members: Members should be compensated if the agency can afford it, with a tuition deduction or term stipend. Course or practicum credit could also be given. Money should be spent at the discretion of the adviser and members.

Evaluations of work: Evaluations should be done by the adviser, client and members. A standard evaluation form should be used. Periodic agency meetings could be used for evaluations.

Agency structure: An effective agency structure for agencies includes, in descending order, a director, assistant director, account executives and staff members. The structure could include both a faculty and professional adviser.

As many types of work as possible should be attempted, doing as much work as possible in-house.

VITA

John Kirk Neal was born in Richmond, Virginia on April 21, 1961. He and his family moved to Tazewell County, Virginia in 1971 where he attended Tannersville Elementary and graduated in 1979 from Rich Valley High School. In the spring of 1984, he graduated from Emory and Henry College in Emory, Virginia with a Bachelor of Arts degree in communications. He completed an internship as managing editor of The Tazewell County Free Press during the winter of 1983-84.

In the fall of 1984, he enrolled at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville and began work on the Master of Science degree in communications. During his time at UTK, he has served as managing editor of Staff Stuff, a UTK employee publication. Following graduation, he will be employed as member services and communications coordinator with Meriwether Lewis Electric Cooperative in Centerville, Tennessee.