Work-integrated learning in public relations campaigns courses: A literature review

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Among the challenges faced by work-integrated learning (WIL) educators, recruiting, selecting, and retaining outside organizations as 'clients' or 'community partners' to work with students looms large. The gap between classroom needs and professional practice often leads to a tangle of unrealistic expectations. These challenges grow even more acute given that faculty often lack the experience, skill, time, and resources critical for fostering partnerships with organizations. To gain a clearer sense of the challenges involved, this article considers the body of literature on one course taught at U.S. universities: the public relations campaigns, with a specific focus on clients. The intention is two-fold: first, it aims to identify opportunities for future research on the course to fill gaps in best practices for faculty working with client organizations; and second, to show how these course-specific issues echo, and potentially expand upon, challenges WIL professionals grapple with regardless of what they teach.

Keywords: Public relations campaigns, service learning, client work, experiential learning

Professionals who provide advice and guidance to organizations (consultants) consistently grapple with the challenges of building mutually beneficial relationships with individuals who hire them and ultimately evaluate their performance (clients.) The consultant, who possesses subject matter knowledge and relevant skills, wants to deliver quality work, get paid, and get rehired (and/or referred to individuals who work elsewhere in the organization, or at other organizations, that might benefit from their services). The client needs to address an important challenge, at a fair cost, by working with someone whose skills and knowledge they have confidence in, who they respect and, ideally with whom they enjoy working. Many books offer advice on how to market to, get hired by, and excel in working with clients so as to build a stable consulting practice (see for example Bellman, 1990; Block & Markowitz, 2000; Maister et al., 2000; Shenson, 1990; Sheth, 2000; Stroh & Johnson, 2005; Weiss, 2009).

That said, the 'magic formula' for success in these different domains consists of as much art as science, in so far as even reading and committing to heart the lessons conveyed in the aforementioned books does not totally prepare an individual to manage the diverse range of individual and situational factors that somehow come together to produce a great consulting experience for all parties concerned. The bottom line: that ideal client who pays the consultant top dollar, is a delight to work with, and sings your praises to friends and colleagues, remains an elusive thing even for the savviest and most experienced consultant. The never-ending quest to find it has caused many consultants sleepless nights as they grapple with the often-tentative nature of such relationships.

I have come to the aforementioned conclusions over the last 30 years (1992 to present), during which time I have provided public relations consulting services to organizations spanning diverse industries (e.g., social service, technology, higher education, healthcare). Despite this experience, self-study, and related

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professional development programs, I continue to find it challenging to find clients who ’check all the boxes’ I have identified above.

In 1998, a few years after I decided to become self-employed by marketing my services as a public relations consultant, I started teaching in higher education. During the early years I was hired to teach public relations classes with the express purpose of providing students an understanding of what practitioners actually did—seeing that I was a practitioner with years of experience in the field. Without a background in WIL, I nonetheless came to the conclusion that the best way to achieve this goal was to provide students the opportunity to actually do public relations work, albeit within the classroom context. That meant case studies published in textbooks, academic journals, or elsewhere, while plentiful, worked well for instructional purposes, but only to a point. I sensed how much students relished the opportunity to work on actual projects offered by organizations, to do ’real work for real clients,’ usually based outside the university’s walls (public relations professionals refer to organizations they work for as clients. In higher education contexts, the terms “industry partner” or “community partner” may be used instead). Therefore, I needed to recruit these organizations to work with my students. In the beginning I relied largely on my own instincts to identify what I believed would be an interesting project and worthy client, drawing my aforementioned consulting background.

Nonetheless, my trial-and-error approach to recruiting clients resulted in many mistakes over the years. It seemed I could always find organizations eager to work with my students, a by-product of having built a broad and deep network in the geographic region where I live. I found I could always ’sell’ organizations on the opportunities such engagements provided if for no other reason than the sheer enthusiasm I could communicate about my class and the students enrolled in it. Besides, I knew that what my students would provide in the form of public relations guidance was something these organizations either did not have access to within their organizations, or simply could not afford to hire based on their limited budgets. Yet I continued to find recruiting and retaining outside organizations to work with my students, as challenging. Some individuals and organizations simply were not well suited to work with students; others had unrealistic expectations despite my best efforts to educate them. It slowly dawned on me that if I struggled, given my experiences as a practitioner and an academic, I imagined that others who had not worked as consultants, who were earlier in their academic careers and/or who had little or no experience in working outside of university environments, would encounter some of the same difficulties that I did—and probably even more so.

Fast forward to the present day. I continue to recruit organizations to work with my students in a variety of professionally oriented classes I teach, including the same public relations classes I was first hired to teach in 1998. Yet I continue to wrestle with the process of client recruitment and retention. It continues to cause me sleepless nights as I plan my classes. Readers of this journal may share my anxieties. That is why I have chosen to focus on these issues in this paper.

First, let me take a few steps back to more broadly frame this challenge as I have described it above in terms familiar to readers of this journal. By definition the very nature of work-integrated learning (WIL) seems to pose a daunting challenge: to intentionally situate learning within the act of working (Cooper et al., 2010). Moreover, as Oliver (2015) argues, WIL should include tasks that either resemble those of graduates in their early careers or which are proximal to workplaces or spaces where professional work occurs. A proposed modification of a widely accepted definition of employability in the work-integrated learning literature is offered as follows:

> Employability means that students and graduates can discern, acquire, adapt and continually enhance the skills, understandings and personal attributes that make them more likely to find and create meaningful paid and unpaid work that benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. (p. 59)

I have long aimed to incorporate the letter and spirit of this definition into my teaching, which led me back to consider what a good client would be for WIL purposes. Given the focus of my consulting practice on public relations, and my ongoing experience (2002 to present) in teaching the public relations campaigns class, I have decided to focus this article on the course as a case study exploring how research has provided guidance to faculty grappling with the task of incorporating outside organizations into their classes. The insight I gained while analyzing the literature on the teaching of this course enabled me to illuminate opportunities for future research on it, as well as provide an opportunity to share related suggestions likely to appeal to readers of this journal encountering similar issues in conjunction with their own courses .

In short, this paper considers the body of literature on the public relations campaigns course, with a focus on inquiry into the client's participation. It aims to identify opportunities for future research to fill gaps in best practices for public relations faculty working with client organizations, which can translate into strong, mutually beneficial relationships between these individuals and community partners/clients. In turn, such analysis points the way to broader considerations of keen interest to WIL faculty in a variety of disciplines.

DEFINING PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the largest professional organization of public relations practitioners in the U.S., defines public relations as "a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (n.d., About public relations section, para. 3). The International Public Relations Association whose members include public relations practitioners from around the world, offers a more nuanced definition, describing public relations as "a decision-making management practice tasked with building relationships and interests between organizations and their publics based on the delivery of information through trusted and ethical communication methods" (n.d., A new definition of public relations section). In short, public relations practitioners must develop advanced skills in relationship building and maintenance not only if they are to best serve the organizations that employ them but also for the betterment of local economies and societies around the world.

THE PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS COURSE

To fulfill the mandate spelled out by the aforementioned professional associations representing public relations professionals, public relations educators and practitioners have partnered to ensure the future workforce gains the skills and aptitudes necessary for success in the profession. In the U.S., that partnership has led to the work of the Commission on Public Relations Education. In 2017, that entity issued a report, *Fast Forward: Foundations + Future State. Educators + Practitioners*, which recommended that undergraduate students attending U.S.-based institutions complete a supervised work experience or internship and a minimum of six courses to earn a degree in public relations, with one of these classes focusing on "campaigns and case studies." The class "should provide students with an opportunity for research, application, critique, and presentation of public relations recommendations based on primary and/or secondary research, coursework, and experience to a real client or as part of a case study analysis" (Commission on Public Relations Education, 2017, p. 63).

In achieving these objectives, the public relations campaigns course serves as the capstone or culminating experience in undergraduate public relations degree programs in the U.S. It thus bears the weight of expectations in terms of preparing students for professional practice even though it by itself can never sufficiently prepare them for experiences outside the classroom as students may lack more fundamental communications-related skills critical for later success, much less the ability to counsel client organizations (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Benigni & Cameron, 1999). Since the 1990s, moreover, the public relations campaigns course has become a model for incorporating service learning into the public relations curriculum. For the purposes of this paper, Bringle and Hatcher's (1996) definition of service learning will be used:

> a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (provides them an opportunity to) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility . . . the service learning experience produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related to course material through reflection activities such as directed writings, small group discussions, and class presentations. (p. 223)

Pivoting back to WIL, service learning represents one type. To that end, Sattler et al. (2011) proposes a typology of WIL with service learning falling under the third of three "underlying philosophies," more specifically "employer/community/institutional partner" (p. 4-5).

Gleason and Violette (2012) posit that the public relations campaigns course is particularly well-suited for service learning as it models ten standards for service learning laid out by Honnett and Poulsen (1989). According to these standards, a well-structured public relations campaigns class ought to be able to: (a) engage people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good; (b) provide structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their experience; (c) articulate clear service and learning goals for everyone; (d) allow for those with needs to define those needs; (e) clarify the responsibilities of each person and organization involved; (f) match service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances; (g) expect genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment; (h) include training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition and evaluation to meet service and learning goals; (i) ensure that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interest of all involved flexible and appropriate time commitments; and (j) commit to program participation by and with a diverse population (Honnett & Poulsen, 1989).

Given its relative importance in the undergraduate public relations curriculum, the public relations campaigns class has been subject to nearly three decades of critical inquiry. The aim of this collective body of research has been to improve teaching, overall student learning, and, most importantly, the contribution of the class to the development of public relations skills in young aspiring professionals.

The majority of contributions to this literature have focused on how pedagogy can best shape classroom experiences to further student learning and overall professional development (see for example Allison, 2008; Farmer et al., 2016; Harrison & Bak, 2017; McCollough, 2018; Muturi et al., 2013; Redcross, 2015). To this end, specific class activities, competition among students, assessment, debriefing exercises, and the predominantly team-based framework of instruction have been considered as arenas ripe for reflection and modification (Farmer et al., 2016; Heflin & Meganck, 2017; Lubbers, 2011; Moody, 2012; Vizcarrondo, 2021).

The organizations, or clients, students work with in the public relations campaigns class are deemed "the essence of the (public relations major's) most important course" (Benigni et al., 2004, p. 260) and its primary beneficiaries (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999). Yet inquiry into challenges faced by faculty and students in working with clients, their recruitment and selection, and, perhaps most importantly, how these clients view the experience of working with public relations campaigns students, has been far less developed. Current understanding of how clients can best participate in the class for the benefit of all stakeholders thus remains limited. Moreover, it is unclear how current teaching and learning practices in the course actually model the aforementioned service learning standards laid out by Honnett and Poulsen (1989).

METHODOLOGY

The starting point for this paper was identifying existing scholarly inquiry into different aspects of the public relations campaigns course as it has been taught at U.S. universities, in particular as they contribute or detract from the experiences of key stakeholders (students, teachers, and clients). To identify relevant scholarly contributions, two phrases were entered into Google Scholar, Academic Search Complete, and ABI/Inform Collection: "public relations campaigns class" and "public relations campaigns course." In addition, key words and phrases were combined with others to narrow search parameters based on those used in other research on the public relations campaigns class, as well as the author's experience in teaching the class. These combinations of words and phrases were "teaching public relations" and "public relations campaigns;" "experiential learning" and "public relations;" "service learning" and "public relations;" and "student-run agency" and "public relations."

Search results were vetted to identify only those refereed contributions that in some fashion addressed the experiences of undergraduate public relations students in the U.S. as they worked with actual clients at any point during their educational experience. This experience includes the public relations campaigns class as well as other academic experiences (some of which were designated as service learning) such as student-run public relations agencies and internships in the field. Contributions that discussed the "communications campaigns course" (Kinnick, 1999; Neuberger, 2016) were considered as background for this discussion but were not included in the literature review, given their emphasis on communications rather than public relations—two different but interrelated disciplines at the undergraduate level in the U.S. Sources cited within this body of articles that were not identified in the original search were also secured (whenever possible) and consulted in the preparation of this article.

In total, 36 refereed journal articles or conference proceedings submissions were included in this literature review (see Appendix A). Each considered how undergraduate public relations students work with clients, some more extensively than others. The lenses through which researchers considered the students' work with clients served as the focus of the analysis, with 26 of these 36 contributions specifically considering the public relations campaigns class as the setting for student work with clients (see Appendix A). This subset of contributions was the focus of the literature review. The remaining ten contributions considered how service learning, student-run agencies, and other classes in the public relations curriculum provided opportunities for client work, independent of their specific experiences in the public relations campaigns class. These ten contributions, while not the primary focus of the literature view, nonetheless informed the analysis that follows and are cited when appropriate.

The findings from this analysis were organized based on topics most frequently covered in the literature on different aspects of the clients' role in the course, to be elaborated on in the following sections of this paper. These topics are the organization of the class; instructor challenges; student challenges; client recruitment and selection; and the client (or community partner) perspectives on working with undergraduate public relations students enrolled in the public relations campaigns class.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS CLASS

When clients are used in the public relations campaigns class, the course often has been organized around them although scholars differ on how the class should be structured (Benigni & Cameron, 1999). PRSA's Bateman Case Study competition has been one popular model for the course, where undergraduate student teams representing some of the 370 Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA)-affiliated chapters across the U.S. create and implement a full public relations campaign and compete with each other to earn the top prize as determined by a panel of judges (PRSSA, 2020; Slater et al., 2011). Using this competition as a model, McCollough (2018), building on the work of Rentner (2012), set up his class so that at the end of the semester students submitted team campaign books, and presented, or pitched them, to clients in head-to-head sessions, a process designed to mimic standard practice for public relations, advertising, and marketing firms, as they solicit and compete for opportunities to complete work on behalf of clients.

Other instructors rely on an agency model, where student work in noncompeting teams on different campaigns for a nonprofit client. In this model the instructor would serve as the Account Supervisor managing student teams of Account Executives—in fact, functioning more of a facilitator, adviser, or coach, than a teacher in the traditional sense of the term, with students taking ownership and assuming more responsibilities for teaching each other (Benigni & Cameron, 1999; Benigni et al., 2007-2008; Worley, 2001).

Some universities establish separate student-run agencies to provide opportunities for students to implement public relations, advertising, and integrated marketing communications activities for professional clients. In general, student agencies consist of a student director (also referred to as Executive Director) and assistant directors, with the remaining students serving as account executives. Students are assigned to client account teams, with team leaders overseeing each account. Some agencies also establish protocols which are incorporated in an employee manual. Faculty advisors leave the general running of the organization to students, although they edit materials before they are seen by clients. Advisors also typically serve as the point of contact for prospective clients (Bush, 2009; Gibson & Rowden, 1994). In light of this structure, Maben and Whitson (2014) argue that the campaigns course could be looked at like an abbreviated version of a student-run agency, with students in the class typically meeting less frequently in their teams and with the client.

Finally, Kim et al. (2021) explored the relative effectiveness of two of the aforementioned approaches for providing undergraduate public relations students the opportunity to work with clients (the student-run agency and two different iterations of the public relations campaigns class) in terms of their contribution to students' perceived learning outcomes. Students rated their experience in a student-run public relations firm better for their learning than the more traditional capstone (public relations campaigns) course experience. That said, the version of the public relations campaigns course with a stronger emphasis on direct client contact and engagement was more effective in achieving learning outcomes than was the course with less direct client interaction (Kim et al., 2021).

INSTRUCTOR CHALLENGES IN TEACHING THE PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS CLASS

The ultimate success of the public relations campaigns course depends upon several variables, particularly faculty expertise (Worley, 2001). Faculty must call on their experience and individual preferences to decide on the mix of technicianship, management skills, theory development, and research implementation in the course, not to mention the use of outside readings, client feedback, and whether the class will use an agency format or case studies (Benigni & Cameron, 1999). Yet they often find the public relations campaigns course the most challenging one to teach with time management cited as a particular problem. Faculty bemoan the lack of institutional support, arguing they were given insufficient time to prepare to teach the course (Muturi et al., 2013; Witmer et al., 2009). In addition, faculty must grapple with a mélange of thorny issues. These include the vagaries of individual students and teamwork, the nature of working with busy and sometimes uncooperative clients with expectations that exceed the capabilities of students, the fact that assignments tend to be due towards the end of the class, and the need to prepare to teach a class that varies from semester to semester, given client needs, new students, and group dynamics that emerge (Benigni et al., 2007-2008; Harrison & Bak, 2017; McElreath & Algren, 2003).

STUDENT CHALLENGES IN COMPLETING THE PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS CLASS

By blending community service and academic instruction with critical thinking through work with community organizations, service learning adds the element of relevance students often perceive is missing from the public relations curriculum (Daugherty, 2003; McCollough, 2018; Rogers & Andrews, 2016). Their efforts enable them to make use of and gain some proficiency in crafting and using previously gained skills in research, writing, and message production, among others (Worley, 2001). Students also perceive service learning client work as a low-risk opportunity to explore their ethical identities and apply ethical competencies while practicing public relations (Place, 2018). At the same time, students deepen their understanding of stakeholder needs, recognize the importance of social responsibility in the practice of public relations, and come to understand the mutually beneficial relationship between them and the community partner they have been working with in the class (Allison, 2008; Daugherty, 2003; Slater et al., 2011; Wandel, 2005).

The students' primary challenge in the public relations campaigns class with an integrated service learning component is to build and maintain relationships with community partners/clients. Yet the road to doing so is often rocky, given limited client understanding of communications principles and what is possible or, conversely, inflated expectations about what is possible as expressed by clients as well as faculty. Students often find service learning challenging as they need to define a community need, work with community partners to devise strategies to solve that need, negotiate the expectations and demands of a client's stakeholders, and then complete relevant course assignments in pursuit of this end—all within one academic semester. Communication between the team leaders of a student-run agency and the clients, combined with poor service issues, can negatively impact client relationships to the point where clients may contact the instructors for intervention with students running the agency. As clients vary in terms of expectations and demands, it becomes difficult for faculty to equitably evaluate student work (Harrison & Bak, 2017; Wandel, 2005). Moreover, some clients hesitate to take inexperienced students seriously. Given the fact that the public relations campaigns course is one semester long, students often feel they must emphasize short-term goals and objectives which often do not meet the needs of the clients (Bush, 2009; McElreath & Algren, 2003; Shadinger & Daggs, 2014). Finally, traditional approaches to teaching the public relations campaigns class have often led students to deliver deficient research, duplicate information (with student teams working on the same client's campaign), inconsistent and disjointed campaign plans, and few deliverables, all of which ultimately fell far short of client expectations—which motivated Heflin and Meganck (2017) to redesign the course to incorporate dynamic teamwork to overcome these problems.

Students in the public relations campaigns course nonetheless benefit from the opportunity to develop a campaign from start to finish, and possibly implement it, as well as the opportunity to supplement portfolio materials. Students in the public relations campaigns class also see how public relations activities fit into an organization's structure and culture and also benefit from the opportunity to teach some clients about effective and strategic public relations. They learn to be accountable not only to instructors, but to clients and each other (Benigni et al., 2004; Worley, 2001). In turn, public relations students highlight these experiences in working with real-world organizations as a vital component of their education in the field, can identify specific key learnings from their client experiences, and, more broadly, can see how their experiences can prepare them for transitions into careers upon completing their education (Farmer et al., 2016; Mehta & Larkin, 2009; Werder & Strand, 2011). Finally, in terms of the public relations campaigns class as a service learning experience, students view their effort as altruistic in terms of the opportunity to address real issues that impact their communities while learning from the agencies that address them. They also understand service learning as part of civic engagement, in terms of the need to be informed about what is going on around them, not simply as a skill building activity (Muturi et al., 2013).

Both faculty and students in the public relations campaigns course appear to have faced different challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic than peers in other classes, given the course's focus on collaborative, client and/or service learned based work. Both stakeholders were challenged to respond nimbly to make decisions about whether or not to continue client relationships and whether it was safe to conduct research. Student access to technology and programs needed to complete assignments in the public relations campaigns course loomed especially. In fact, the degrees of success faculty experienced in converting campaigns courses online were a direct result of whether students had access to resources and technology (Formentin & Auger, 2021).

RECRUITING AND SELECTING CLIENTS FOR THE PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS CLASS

Client recruitment and selection merit most of the attention in the literature on the public relations campaigns class, above and beyond consideration of common challenges faced by both faculty and students as described above. In fact, client recruitment and selection have been deemed "fundamental" to the service learning experience (Slater et al., 2011, p. 117) with the specific recommendation that faculty seek out organizations that "address compelling human needs" as they are most appealing to students who can identify with, and ideally see first-hand, the fruits of their labor (Kinnick, 1999, p. 166). Even so, the selection of clients is far from straightforward, as variables such as whether the organization is for-profit or non-profit and internal (within the university) or external (within the community) must be considered along with whether clients will pay or be considered service learning partners. On-campus and nonprofit clients increase the visibility of the class, the major, and faculty member. The disadvantage to using these clients is their often-limited knowledge about public relations. Students must work much harder to "educate" these clients in the ways of public relations, as well as to develop the final plans (Worley, 2001, p. 57).

Client retention typically lies outside the domain of the public relations campaigns course, although Benigni et al. (2004) argue that searching for and retaining clients should be addressed. Many professors must spend considerable time researching and otherwise seeking out clients, as Benigni et al. (2004) note only 60% have a prior affiliation with the client before the course, and 92% seek referrals for the course. Rentner (2012) notes that challenges faculty members face in terms of accessing potential organizations to work with students as well as the logistics of doing so often lead campaigns professors to offer only on-campus clients, with a third of campaigns professors using the same real client for more than one semester (Benigni et al., 2004).

Benigni et al. (2007-2008) advise professors to seek help from local agencies in recruiting clients for the public relations campaigns course. These agencies may appreciate the opportunity to expose clients to "a fresh form of outside counsel" (p. 5). They may even refer clients to faculty members for use in the public relations campaigns class that do not fit their agency profile.

Rogers and Andrews (2013) advise faculty members to use Requests for Proposals (RFPs to attract clients, a suggestion also offered by a respondent to the survey conducted by Aldoory and Wrigley (1999), in an effort to provide greater motivation and seriousness about working with students by adding more formality and rigor to the recruitment process. Even so, prospective clients who participated in their study were confused by the RFP process, indicating that they were unclear about their communication goals when they completed their application in response to the RFP and exactly how a public relations campaigns course could help them. These community partners also misunderstood what the final outcome from the students would be, regardless of the class, when they responded to the RFP. The degree of involvement required of them as organizations working with students in the public relations campaigns course also was not clear to partners at the front end, moreover. Frequently, clients also said that the service learning relationship required much more time than they expected and suggested that the RFP describe the time commitment more specifically.

In a study on three foundation classes in the public relations curriculum (which did not include the public relations campaigns course), Daugherty (2003) notes that students approached the nonprofit organizations on their own to forge partnerships for the purposes of completing class assignments, and subsequently obtained instructor approval to work with them. Organizations working with students in the publications course, one of those covered in this study, sought brochures and newsletters, yet ultimately appreciated the broader efforts by students to develop campaigns based on research with specific goals, objectives, and strategies as well as the creative materials ultimately produced by student teams. Overall, community partners responded positively to the quality of work produced by students and would welcome future opportunities to work on service learning projects. The need for increased communication between institution and the client organization and the need for early student contact were most often cited by Daugherty (2003) as areas that needed improvement.

Werder and Strand (2011) describe a different approach to recruiting clients in their study, the primary purpose of which was to assess the effectiveness of learning in the public relations campaigns course. Public relations faculty formed a partnership with the university's community engagement office, which helped to identify local organizations with communication problems to serve as clients for the class each semester. The course served more than 72 organizations, mostly nonprofits, during the time period covered by this study.

Faculty engagement of clients is considered critical for their successful integration in the public relations campaigns course, in the form of introducing their organizations to students, providing information, and being involved in the grading process. Such active involvement in the classroom has been linked to significant use of student plan books by the clients (Benigni et al., 2004; Daugherty, 2003). Along the same vein, plan books saved clients time and served as templates to guide subsequent action with the overarching benefit being that working with students in the public relations campaigns class challenged clients to reflect on what they do, provide justification for their efforts to students, and to answer questions (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999).

For the most part, the literature on the public relations campaigns class identifies the faculty member as initiating the relationship with the nonprofit organization, and in the one instance cited above, the students, for the purposes of meeting class requirements. Yet cases exist where non-profit organizations have taken a more proactive approach, initiating relationships with public relations campaigns classes to support their efforts to address challenges related to awareness of their services among key stakeholders. For example, Hines et al. (2019) partnered with two different public relations campaigns classes at the University of Florida to solicit their participation in an effort to increase awareness of changes in library services at two branches on campus. The primary aim of the study reporting on their work with the students was to address a gap in the literature on the marketing and promotion of librarians, as well as assessment of such efforts, as opposed to a specific focus on a public relations campaign. To that end they consider different forms of collaboration between students and librarians, not simply ones limited to the public relations campaigns course, with "deep participation, level 2,"where the student is a collaborator and partner on a particular project, describing the optimal level of collaboration between library and students. Such partnerships were deemed a success, given that they produced recommendations not previously considered by library staff and "successfully reenergized marketing and public relations efforts for both branches" (p. 75).

In another case study, Silverman (2007) explored the teaching of a public relations campaigns course involving the creation and implementation of a public health campaign about organ donation for a real-world client. The client had worked with another university in the past to develop an organ donation campaign for its students, and subsequently received a grant to study the effectiveness of student-designed public relations campaigns for organ donations. In other words, the client itself initiated the relationship with the public relations campaigns class in question to address a challenge directly relevant to students, and therefore considered student participation vital to their efforts, much as the librarians had in Hines et al.'s (2019) piece.

The case studies developed by Hines et al. (2019) and Silverman (2007) offer insight into the perspectives of some organizations that serve as clients in the public relations campaigns class, building on the earlier work of Aldoory and Wrigley (1999), among others. That said, Aldoory and Wrigley (1999) failed to identify any study that explored opinions of clients much less which solicited their feedback on the experience of working with students enrolled in the public relations campaigns class. Akpabio (2012), who explored organizational responses to campaign materials produced by students in a public relations and advertising campaigns class in Botswana, likewise bemoaned the limited insight into client perspectives. In an effort to fill this void, his students reached out to local small and medium enterprises they determined were "not being advertised" (p. 5). These students in turn offered to design a campaign for their products or services. Beneficiaries of student efforts identified in this study deeply appreciated their work, acknowledging the value of both strategic and tactical components of the campaign.

CLIENT (COMMUNITY PARTNER) PERSPECTIVE ON RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

Rogers and Andrews (2016) observed that "relatively little scholarly evidence existed about the communication needs of nonprofit community partners and what they think constitutes an ideal SL relationship" (p. 96). This domain necessarily informs the recruitment, selection, and retention of clients in the course. To begin to address this void in the literature, they solicited the perspectives of these nonprofit partners on working with students in the public relations campaigns class via a focus group and staff survey. Seventy percent of these organizations did not have a dedicated communications/marketing/public relations person on their staff, although 87% of respondents' job descriptions included communications/marketing/public relations; moreover, about half of the responding organizations had a full-time staff of five or fewer, with most of the remainder operating with a staff of six to fifteen employees. The "single greatest communications pain point" for respondents was the absence of a dedicated communications staff person, with "no clear direction to start from/no organizational strategy," "low priority" (for communications), and "too busy with existing tasks" vying for the second most significant communications "pain point" (p. 100). "Social media execution" was ranked highest for the type of assistance nonprofit organizations would benefit most from by working with service learning students; print-ready pieces, a written plan with ideas, and then an oral presentation of those ideas were identified as outcomes that would best serve the organizations. Based on this data, Rogers and Andrews (2016) observed that nonprofit staff seemed more concerned about tactics and print-ready pieces. This suggests that

> nonprofit community partners' level of knowledge and understanding of the potential outcomes of a public relations campaign can lead to misguided requests and expectations, possible dissatisfaction with the outcomes, or the inability to execute students' recommendations and ideas because of capacity challenges…. absent this public relations background and experience, community partners often approach the SL table with the inability to ask for what they need. (p. 101-102)

Rogers and Andrews (2016) argue nonprofits require better education about public relations to help instructors prepare students in the campaigns class, and thus their needs ought to be incorporated into scholarship on the course if the "mutual benefit to the community partner" is to be realized (p. 103). This responsibility falls on faculty, although the timing, duration, and content of this education remain unexplored in this piece, yet are suggested as topics that warrant future research.

Indeed, as Rogers and Andrews (2016) note, students contribute ideas and directions while completing service learning projects that ultimately benefit the community partner. In this sense their study echoes the work of Karasik (2020), whose online survey of community partners identified the top three benefits they reaped by working with students on class projects: 1) access to "additional human resources" (i.e., "supplemental staffing," "professional quality work at no cost;" and "assist(ance) with much needed research and/or volunteer work"); 2) "increased agency visibility" (including public awareness, networking, and recruiting both future employees and additional volunteers;") and 3) access to "fresh perspectives" (i.e., "new ideas," "diversity," "enthusiasm and energy" (p. 121-122).

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The existing literature on the role of the client in the public relations campaigns class, as presented above, largely considers the client from the perspective of the needs of faculty and students, and even when it extends beyond them, falls short in terms of providing a well-rounded picture of organizations as equal partners and as such meriting more expansive coverage that better equips students and faculty alike to work productively with them. Rogers and Andrews (2016) opened the door to this area of inquiry and their work merits replication and expansion to include larger data sets encompassing a broader, more diverse range of nonprofit organizations that might even be further segmented by services provided and/or population served, not to mention size, additional data points that could prove valuable to faculty in their efforts to recruit suitable nonprofit organizations to work with the students in the public relations campaigns class.

The existing literature on the public relations campaigns course considers more expansively the actual strategies used to identify, qualify, confirm, and evaluate prospective clients. These strategies to recruit organizations to work with students include building partnerships with local public relations agencies; developing and disseminating RFPs; partnering with the university's community engagement office; connecting with organizations proactively seeking opportunities to work with students; and empowering students to recruit community partners themselves. Some nonprofits sought out the public relations campaigns class to achieve their strategic objectives, predicated on their clarity about what they needed and (at least in one instance) the ability to secured funding (Rogers & Andrews, 2016). Yet apart from the studies referred to above there is little inquiry into what faculty are doing by way of actually implementing these approaches, not to mention their relative effectiveness. Perhaps more importantly, it is unclear how new and/or otherwise inexperienced faculty (much less more experienced faculty members) might successfully implement them given limited time and resources. Future research, in the form of mixed method studies incorporating surveys and interviews, might elicit this information from faculty teaching the public relations campaigns class, which would represent a vital complement to greater insight into community partner needs that responds to the call of Rogers and Andrews (2016).

More broadly, we have little evidence to go on in terms of understanding criteria faculty members use to select organizations to work with students in the public relations campaigns course. Possible variables to be explored individually, and as they interact with one another, include the instructor's status (i.e., non-tenure track, tenure-track, tenured); their experience as a public relations practitioner (if any); a relationship with someone at the organization; another departmental or university relationship with the organization (including, but not limited to, the entity that coordinates the university's service learning opportunities and with it relationship-building with community partners); size and/or reputation of the organization; fit between the organization and the university's mission; ease of access (i.e., students find it easier to connect real-time with the organization given its geographic proximity to the school); and others.

Expanding on the last point regarding student access to clients, how faculty members can glean what makes an ideal client for their students in the public relations campaigns class needs to be revisited. The existing literature tells us that good projects, support of the class and students, and open communication with the instructor and students are critical. But what about student interests and skill levels? How are clients matched with students? How about the need for community partners to reflect diversity in their staff, board, and the populations that it serves? How does the faculty member weigh what the community partner needs against what is achievable in a semester given limited time and nascent, often diverse student skillsets in public relations courses? In short, given currently existing research, it is difficult to ascertain the precise mix of these factors, much less how individual faculty members weigh them in soliciting clients for their public relations campaigns course.

What constitutes better education for nonprofit organizations about public relations, and who provides that education, appears difficult to pin down, as Rogers and Andrews (2016) suggest. Given the pressures students and faculty in the public relations campaigns already face, as noted in the existing literature, to what extent is it realistic or even practical to educate clients above and beyond the necessary dialogue that occurs in advance of the class to determine the scope of the project? Is it reasonable for students and/or faculty to do that? Again, it seems that additional input from faculty members teaching the public relations campaigns class would go a long way towards providing guidance to better navigate the often-thorny challenges likely to be encountered as the students gain invaluable, hands-on experience in doing the work of public relations professionals as one point of entry into the actual profession when they graduate.

Along the same vein, Witmer et al. (2009) raise the possibility of institutional issues shaping to what extent faculty members embrace community engagement. Service learning offices may require additional reporting or paperwork, adding to instructor workload. Do the institutional issues of risk management and liability discourage faculty engagement in service learning? What other institutional challenges, if any, do faculty members who teach service learning classes face? Moreover, the role service learning might play in the retention and promotion process for faculty, specifically, tenure-track faculty, would seem to be a factor here. It has largely been unexplored.

The literature on the public relations campaigns class frames the class as a service learning opportunity, where undergraduate public relations students work with nonprofit organizations. Indeed, most classes tend to partner with nonprofit organizations, but not all do (Werder & Strand, 2011). That points to the need to explore non-service learning options for the public relations campaigns class. For example, given that some students worry about their experiences in working with nonprofit organizations transfer to other fields, Fraustino et al. (2019) offer an alternative, place-branding campaigns, which in their study amounted to aid to two struggling rural towns to reimagine themselves after a period of economic decline. Similarly, McCollough (2019) presents a multi-term service learning project across multiple public relations courses to promote a new arts and culture venue managed by the university which grew to include efforts to help the local community adapt to a travel and tourism economy. Such foci afford students opportunities to work with a wide range of stakeholders with a longer-term focus than typical projects for nonprofit organizations allow, benefits that make such campaigns promising for use in multiple public relations classes. How to identify and recruit individuals and organizations to make this option possible for the public relations campaigns class would thus seem to be a topic worth exploring further.

Perhaps more importantly, there is no mention in the existing literature on the public relations campaigns class taught in a format other than service learning, or in academic programs other than those designed for undergraduate students. The rapid growth of online education at traditional educational institutions, including graduate degree programs in public relations and related fields, as well as alternative teaching and learning platforms (e.g., Coursera, LinkedIn Learning), represent potential alternate contexts for the public relations campaigns class that typically are not service learning oriented. Identifying such classes and exploring if and how they incorporate clients into their instruction might yield even more alternatives that faculty teaching undergraduate service learning versions of the course could learn from and adapt to meet their own needs.

Finally, this literature review focused solely on public relations campaigns courses offered by U.S. educational institutions. An exploration of the experiences of students and faculty in comparable classes offered by non-U.S.-based institutions would clearly enrich the understanding of the issues raised here.

In short, the public relations campaigns class represents an exciting, dynamic learning opportunity for each of its stakeholders, in particular the interaction between client, student, and faculty member. Further research to fill gaps in the literature related to the role of the client, by exploring the issues outlined here can contribute significantly to help it realize this ultimate objective.

INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR WIL PRACTITIONERS WORKING IN DIVERSE CONTEXTS

Cronley et al. (2015) argue that service learning projects require "more forethought" (p. 285) among both faculty members and their community partners. One might extrapolate from the aforementioned analysis of the literature on the role of the client in the public relations campaigns class that the same observation might apply to projects other than those designated as service learning. Thus, practitioners working in diverse contexts outside of the domain of undergraduate public relations education in the U.S. might consider the following check list of requirements or potential 'best practices' as they undertake related tasks. They're divided into three lists, one for each of the key stakeholders involved in a course where students complete a project for an outside organization (whether university-based or outside of it). The lists were informed in part by the review of the literature completed in conjunction with the development of this article and, more importantly, the author's experience in teaching the public relations campaigns class and his nearly three decades of public relations consulting work. When the literature offered specific ideas or recommendations that fell outside the author's experiences and insight, it is cited.

To start, the client, or community partner, in the course:

- Knows it has a specific need or problem that students can help to address.
- Understands the potential impacts of the students' work and can communicate it to other internal stakeholders.
- Has access to and can share information and resources that students and faculty will require to successfully complete the project.

- Commits to working closely with faculty members to identify and craft projects that not only will likely interest and engage students, but which can be completed within a designated academic timeframe (e.g., quarter, semester).
- Answer student questions and provides feedback in a timely manner.
- Attends the final campaign presentation, and/or offers substantive feedback on the quality of the student work product as well as the instructor's oversight of the student-client experience.
- Embraces the role as co-educator through working with students, and/or shows willingness to learn how to do so.
- Possesses subject matter and/or functional experience in the course subject, and optimally has done the very work that students will be completing on their behalf.

The students in this course:

- Have an interest in the organization that will serve as clients or community partners, as well as the project they will be completing.
- Obtain training and orientation from clients prior to the start of their work with them, so they can help in a way that truly benefits them (Cronley et al., 2015).
- Commit to the highest standards of professionalism in working with the client, as instructed by the faculty member.
- Seek guidance from their instructor about how to address challenges that arise during their work on the project, before approaching the client.

Finally, the faculty in this course are advised to:

- Aim to facilitate partnerships with organizations that are "equitable, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial" (Karasik, 2020, p. 113).
- Understand the role of an external consultant in working with organizations, either through personal experience, study (reading the books cited in the opening section of this paper, and/or completing a course on consulting skills), or engaging with individuals who can share such experience.
- Provide students with insight and guidance on working with clients as external consultants.
- Provide clients insight and guidance on working with students.
- Obtain education and/or training regarding the realities of the organizations with which their students will be working (Cronley et al., 2015).
- Set expectations among students and clients for the outcomes of their relationship.
- Monitor these expectations and proactively address challenges encountered by students and clients.
- Solicit feedback from students and clients throughout the course, and after the course has completed.
- Use diverse strategies to recruit clients, for example, school's service learning office; university alumni (and/or students who completed the same class in the past); word of mouth via academic colleagues; word of mouth via contacts outside the university; organizations in which they are involved.

- Spare no effort in acknowledging the participation of clients in their class both inside and outside the university.
- Spare no effort in celebrating the achievements of students in completing work for their clients throughout the class.

When students complete 'real work, tackling real problems, for real organizations' the phrase I use to describe the kinds of projects described in this paper - they gain experience and insight into work that other forms of teaching and learning simply cannot provide. Yet only when these organizations are considered as equal partners in this relationship can such benefits be realized for all stakeholders. One hopes this paper can serve as a contribution to ongoing discourse on core issues that are involved in this domain.

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APPENDIX A: Review of literature that explores the participation of clients in the public relations campaigns class.

Author and Year of Publication	Paper Topic	Relevance
Akpabio (2012)	Considers perspectives of organizations on student work products produced in service learning course on advertising and public relations campaigns at University of Botswana.	PRCC, SL
Aldoory & Wrigley (1999)	Considers use of 'real clients' in public relations campaigns class, by incorporating client perspectives on their experience in working with students.	Clients, PRCC
Allison (2008)	Adapts National Society of Experiential Education approach to the public relations campaigns course, thereby integrating service and reflection components into main components of a public relations campaign.	PRC, PRCC, SL
Benigni & Cameron (1999)	Considers strategies for teaching the public relations campaigns course, including the role of the client.	Clients, PRCC
Benigni, Cheng, & Cameron (2004)	Focuses on role of the client in the public relations campaigns course, specifically extent of their involvement, how faculty can better engage them, and their level of satisfaction with student work.	Clients, PRCC
Benigni, Wood, & Cameron (2007-2008)	Discusses best practices for how faculty can incorporate local public relations agencies into their teaching of the public relations campaigns class.	PRCC
Boynton & Carter (2021)	Discusses student perceptions of move to online learning necessitated by the pandemic in a service learning public relations writing class.	Clients, SL
Bush (2009)	Explores value of student-management public relations agencies in terms of their reliance on experiential learning and acquisition of professional skills.	Clients, SL, PRCC
Daugherty (2003)	Explores perceptions of students and community partners who worked together in several classes in an undergraduate public relations curriculum.	Clients, SL
Farmer, Perry, & Ha (2016)	Replicates Werder & Strand (2011) study, and extends it by framing value of service learning in public relations campaigns course for potential value to university as a whole as well as to individual longer-term engagement in and commitment to service.	PRCC, SL
Formentin & Auger (2021)	Considers how public relations professors adapted their public relations campaigns courses to facilitate online learning in Spring 2020. Emphasis was placed on exploring the challenges related to modifying coursework, managing student groups, and maintaining client relationships.	PRCC, client
Fraustino, Pressgrove, & Colistra (2019)	Considers an expanded domain for service learning projects in the public relations campaigns class (beyond non-profit organizations), specifically by place-branding for towns.	PRCC, SL
Gleason & Violette (2012)	Offers a framework for integrating service learning into the public relations curriculum.	PRCC, SL

Harrison & Bak (2017)	Argues for contingency management approach to service learning projects in public relations courses, applying Drake's (2000) four components of service learning (meaningful service to the community, a clear connection between course objectives and service activities, structured opportunities for reflection and education for citizenship) to the teaching of the public relations campaigns class.	PRCC, SL
Heflin & Meganck (2017)	Focuses on 'new approach' to teaching public relations campaigns class, focusing on the team in lieu of typical tendencies of students to 'divide and conquer' in order to complete assignments.	PRCC
Hines, Elrod, Huet, Ewing, & Freund (2019)	Considers library public relations strategies geared towards students in general, with focus on partnership with public relations students enrolled in public relations campaigns classes to assess efforts and recommend future initiatives.	PRC, PRCC
Kim (2015)	Case study of student-run public relations agency at a university, focusing on the completion of campaigns for clients, with the express goal of achieving service learning outcomes.	PRC, SL
Kim, Meganck, Kristiansen, & Woo, (2021)	Considers relative effectiveness of three experiential learning approaches in public relations education (student-run public relations agency vs. two iterations of public relations campaigns course), with the former proving more effective in furthering student learning. The campaigns class that offered more direct, extensive contact with clients furthered student learning better than a version of the course set up with less direct clients contact.	PRC, PRCC
Lubbers (2011)	Considers the nature of peer evaluations in the public relations campaigns course, and whether they could contribute to an overall evaluation of students.	PRCC
Maben & Whitson (2014)	Explores perceptions of faculty advisors to student-run public relations agencies, with a focus on student learning and professional preparedness.	Clients, PRC, PRCC
McCain & Miller (2013)	Focuses on problem-based learning approach to a campaign assignment completed by students in two different communications classes.	PRC
McCollough (2018)	Considers issue of competition among student groups in public relations campaigns class, in particular its impact on campaign quality, student experience, client satisfaction, and achievement of learning outcomes.	PRCC
Muturi et al. (2013)	Explores perceptions of public relations students enrolled in the public relations campaigns class of participating in university-sponsored service learning projects.	PRCC, SL
Place (2018)	Considers how students perceive the value of working with clients in service learning classes, in so far as how such experiences contribute to their ethical development.	Clients, SL

Redcross (2015)	Explores how students can benefit from presenting their public relations campaigns class work before a university-wide audience.	PRC, PRCC
Rentner (2012)	Considers how competition among student teams in public relations campaigns class as integral for learning and teaching of course.	PRCC
Rogers & Andrews (2013)	Proposes a Request for proposal (RFP) process to solicit clients for the public relations writing course, with goal of elevating the importance of the client-faculty member-student relationship.	Clients, SL
Rogers & Andrews (2016)	Investigates community partner perceptions of working with public relations students to address their communications needs through the campaigns course.	Clients, PRCC, SL
Shadinger & Daggs (2014)	Considers how to improve second-year of student-run public relations agency, with a focus on client service (and based entirely on client feedback).	Clients
Silverman (2007)	Offers case study on teaching public relations campaigns class using 'real' health care industry client (with real outcomes).	PRCC
Slater, Bartoo, & Puglisi (2011)	Identifies 'best practices' for teaching the public relations campaigns course by offering specific guidance on service learning.	PRCC, SL
Texter & Smith (1999)	Presents approach for integrating service learning into the 'public relations seminar' course, including recruiting of community partners and creating two assignments (one focusing on strategic planning, the other on 'more specific events or communication needs.'	PRC, SL
Wandel (2005)	Examines learning outcomes associated with teaching public relations writing as a service learning course.	SL
Werder & Strand (2011)	Describes general service learning assessment instrument that measures students' perceptions of their development of key public relations skills, along with citizenship and social responsibility mindsets, as a result of their participation in community-based projects in a public relations campaigns course.	PRCC, SL
Witmer, Silverman, & Gaschen (2009)	Explores faculty perceptions of service learning in public relations programs, with the emphasis of learning outcomes on public relations rather than service learning related issues.	SL
Worley (2001)	Advocates for inclusion of 'campaign planning' course in undergraduate public relations curriculum, one of whose objectives would be to 'create and maintain effective relationships with clients.'	Clients, PRCC

Note. Clients = community partners or other organizations working with students; PRC = public relations campaigns; PRCC = public relations campaigns course; SL = service learning.

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About the Journal

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues related to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE).

In this Journal, WIL is defined as " *An educational approach involving three parties – the student, educational institution, and an external stakeholder – consisting of authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum. Students learn through active engagement in purposeful work tasks, which enable the integration of theory with meaningful practice that is relevant to the students' discipline of study and/or professional development"* (Zegwaard et al., 2023, p. 38*). Examples of practice include off-campus workplace immersion activities such as work placements, internships, practicum, service learning, and cooperative education (co-op), and on-campus activities such as work-related projects/competitions, entrepreneurships, student-led enterprise, student consultancies, etc. WIL is related to, and overlaps with, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, WIL practitioners, curricular designers, and researchers. The Journal encourages quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of quality practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

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Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL is of two forms: 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of work-integrated learning and, 2) *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider good practice submissions.

Research publications should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry. A detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. A description of the research findings - tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance to current established literature, implications for practitioners and researchers, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the data, and a conclusion preferably including suggestions for further research.

Topical discussion articles should contain a clear statement of the topic or issue under discussion, reference to relevant literature, critical and scholarly discussion on the importance of the issues, critical insights to how to advance the issue further, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.

Good practice and program description papers. On occasions, the Journal seeks manuscripts describing a practice of WIL as an example of good practice, however, only if it presents a particularly unique or innovative practice or was situated in an unusual context. There must be a clear contribution of new knowledge to the established literature. Manuscripts describing what is essentially 'typical', 'common' or 'known' practices will be encouraged to rewrite the focus of the manuscript to a significant educational issue or will be encouraged to publish their work via another avenue that seeks such content.

By negotiation with the Editor-in-Chief, the Journal also accepts a small number of *Book Reviews* of relevant and recently published books.

*Zegwaard, K. E., Pretti, T. J., Rowe, A. D., & Ferns, S. J. (2023). Defining work-integrated learning. In K. E. Zegwaard & T. J. Pretti (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of work-integrated learning* (3rd ed., pp. 29-48). Routledge.

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