



PRSSA/PRSA Relationship Manual

ADVANCING THE PROFESSION
AND THE FUTURE PROFESSIONAL.

Oh, the Things You Can Do!! (with apologies to Dr. Seuss)

There's so much to learn and so many ways
It could fill many hours, in fact, many days.
So where do you start? Where's the beginning?
To help out students, inning by inning.

Let's start with a list, then work our way through
A checklist of items that we all can do
Start out the year by setting your goals
Pick what you want and then fill in the holes
Demonstrate ethics and the way PR works
Provide all the facts, explain all the quirks
Get Pros to advise you, set up meetings and tours
Keep students attending, provide them the lures
You'll need to get mentors, pros with job leads
For phone calls, e-mails and shadowing needs
From interns to first jobs, help is the key
To match up the students with what is "To Be"
Just lay out the steps and then follow your plan
Get to know all the pros, do all that you can
There's so much to learn! Oh, the Things You Can Do,
'Cuz when everyone helps, it's just more fun too!!

Oh, the Things You Can Do!!

There's so much to learn and so many ways

It could fill many hours, in fact, many days.

Building and maintaining a relationship between a PRSSA Chapter and the local PRSA Chapter can be accomplished in a number of ways. This guide of ideas and best practices can help you decide where to apply your resources and how to strengthen your PRSSA/PRSA Chapter relationships.

Faculty and Professional Advisors

Every year, PRSSA Chapters elect one faculty advisor and one or two professional advisors who serve as the connection to the sponsoring PRSA Chapter. These advisors are among the most visible role models of the public relations profession and they can help your Chapter access the talent and valuable resources of PRSA.

Chapter Liaison

Your Chapter should consider electing a liaison to attend the local PRSA meetings. The liaison will open the lines of communication between your members and the professionals. The liaison can also help solicit financial support, speakers, volunteer opportunities and job leads from PRSA and the professional community.

Networking

The field of public relations covers a diverse number of activities and areas of specialization. Your Chapter should inform members about the networking opportunities available within the professional community, as well as the diversity of career opportunities offered in the field. This will help students decide what areas best suit his/her skills and interests.

All of these activities increase the value of PRSSA membership to public relations students. By presenting valuable opportunities to network with PRSA professionals, you offer something that students cannot find elsewhere in his/her college curriculum.

So where do you start? Where's the beginning?

To help out students, inning by inning.

Every PRSSA member is at a different stage in his/her education and decision-making process. A strong relationship with the local PRSA Chapter can enhance the ability to answer many of the questions students may have about their futures.

To develop an effective PRSSA/PRSA relationship, it is necessary to interact with professionals as often as possible. The faculty and professional advisors can help identify areas that most interest Chapter members.

This can be accomplished through a variety of activities -- from the speakers recruited to speak at Chapter meetings to mentoring programs and joint activities with the professional Chapter. This guidebook has many useful ideas to help students along the way.

Let's start with a list, then work our way through

A checklist of items that we all can do.

Consider some of the following important options for your Chapter:

- Offer professional ethics training
- Identify and recruit PR professionals to speak at PRSSA meetings
- Facilitate PR tours of media and communications facilities, agencies and corporations
- Develop and maintain mentoring programs
- Research and promote internship programs
- Conduct joint PRSSA/PRSA public service campaigns
- Provide workshops on resume writing, portfolio critiques and interviewing skills
- Provide career guidance through campus counseling centers and advisors
- Assist in job searches for entry level professionals

Start out the year by setting your goals

Pick what you want and then fill in the holes.

At the beginning of the school year, the PRSSA Chapter should meet with faculty and professional advisors to determine the objectives for the coming year. Include leaders from the sponsoring PRSA Chapter to participate in the discussion as well. This will help the PRSA Chapter decide how to best assist the students and will also be helpful when students seek assistance from PRSA during the year.

By approaching the professionals with a plan in place, you will demonstrate that you possess the skills that will be essential in the public relations profession. It will also enhance the working relationship and give the professionals an opportunity to review objectives, recommend additions/changes and provide advice. Often times, students will end up with more than they had originally planned, making it a win-win situation for everyone.

Indirectly, this will affect the Chapter's recruiting efforts and further a good turnout at meetings and events.

Note: It might be more productive if the PRSSA Chapter does an off-site planning retreat shortly after new officers are elected in the spring. This helps team building as well as getting off to a great start while everyone is still excited about their new positions. The more planning the Chapter does in advance, the better.

This information can then be put into promotional brochures, posters, press releases, etc. to be used in the fall when students return to campus and are seeking the opportunities that meet their interests. The more you can tell them about the benefits of membership in PRSSA at that time, the more likely you are to increase membership.

Demonstrate ethics and the way PR works

Provide all the facts, explain all the quirks.

Many PRSA Chapters have ethics officers in place. The ethics officer is responsible for communicating the importance of ethics, its role in the profession, and ensuring that the professional community conducts itself appropriately and professionally.

The ethics officer, along with other PRSA professionals, can provide a solid and ethical foundation for students, which is essential to our reputation and our success. February is "Ethics Month" and will be a good time to communicate this information to the PRSSA Chapter members.

It is also a good idea to recruit PRSA professionals to discuss ethics in relation to their jobs and provide case studies (their own or others from the body of knowledge). This will help students understand the role of public relations and how ethics are essential to its success. If you would like more information on which PRSA Chapters have ethics officers in place, contact PRSA Headquarters at 1-800-WER-PRSA (800-937-7772).

Note: The 2005 Bateman Case Study was based upon the ethics subject. If your Chapter submitted a case study, consider using it as part of your training and introduction to ethics. If not, contact the PRSSA staff at Headquarters and see if any of the Bateman cases are available for your use.

Get Pros to advise you, set up meetings and tours

Keep students attending, provide them the lures.

Develop a speaker calendar:

Determine a fixed schedule for PRSSA meetings and identify the topics and professional speakers that you would like to participate. Ask the professional liaison or the PRSA Chapter President to help you identify and invite the professionals you need. Provide the calendar to school publications, local newspapers and the PRSA Chapter to promote during their meetings. In addition, assign a Chapter officer to follow up with confirmations, meeting logistics, and thank-you letters after the speaking engagements.

Provide media tours:

Many students will be responsible for media relations during internships and class projects, but they have little or no knowledge of how media relations really works. Schedule media tours with local print and electronic media to explain the process and get firsthand input from journalists on how they select stories, pitch story ideas, what information is important from public relations professionals, and the do's and don'ts of media relations.

Provide agency tours:

Understanding how an agency works—from pitching to budgets to billing clients—often provides great insight into career decisions for PR students. The opportunity to work on a variety of projects within multiple teams is attractive to many, while others find it more comfortable to seek a corporate PR job. Agency and media tours give the same, valuable insight into an important part of the profession. Contact local professionals and ask for their assistance in planning these events. Pair one or two students with a professional to help with the logistics and interactions between the students and the agency representative(s).

Provide corporate tours:

From crisis communications to corporate giving programs and employee communications, there is a wide range of public relations activities associated with corporate PR. Ask larger companies in your area to provide a briefing or overview of their PR functions and the way in which they interface with the company, its employees and its stockholders. This will help students to understand the ways in which they can apply their skills in this area.

Speed networking evening:

Recruit a variety of professionals to participate in a speed networking opportunity for your students. Set a professional at a table and give each student 10-15 minutes to talk to them about what they do in their job, what specific training/education it requires, the types of career opportunities, etc. At the end of that time, ring a bell or signal the students to move to the next table. The event can be timed to accommodate the number of students and/or professionals you were able to recruit. Make sure you also allow open time at each end of the evening/afternoon to have strictly social interaction as well.

You'll need to get mentors, pros with job leads

For phone calls, e-mails and shadowing needs.

A mentoring program is a valuable way to introduce students to networking, provide one-on-one career counseling, research the types of public relations work, and demonstrate the value of membership in PRSSA and PRSA. It is also one of the best ways to connect the student to professional relationship, by eliminating the intimidation that many students feel when contacting professionals in their community. Make sure that the program you provide for students emphasizes the idea that professionals are interested in participating and are looking forward to having the student contact them.

There are many ways in which a mentoring program can be designed. Some of the following suggestions will be helpful in creating a program for your Chapter:

1. Identify the students who are interested in a mentoring program and categorize them by experience, year in school and objectives. This will help you match them with a professional who best meets his/her needs. Work closely with the professional liaison and local PRSA Chapter to identify professionals interested in mentoring. It is often more effective if the professionals ask fellow practitioners to participate in a mentoring program.
2. Clearly outline the requirements of the program for the student and the professional, prior to their beginning the program. This will allow him/her to understand and agree to the commitment, avoiding any misconceptions of what the program will offer.
3. The responsibility for making initial contact and defining the mentoring objectives should reside with the student. By doing this, the student learns how to effectively make professional contacts, improve his/her networking skills, and partake in an activity that will become a skill necessary for their success in public relations. It will also preclude a professional from spending a great deal of time tracking down a student who is too busy or not interested in participating in the program.
4. A kick-off reception or meeting for the students and professionals has proven to be successful in helping both parties become more comfortable with the mentoring program and establish the relationship earlier and more easily than phone calls or e-mails between the individuals. You might include it as part of an initial meeting of the PRSSA Chapter in the fall or as a part of a local professional meeting in order to reduce the number of meetings and improve attendance.

5. Like any PR campaign, an evaluation of the progress is also recommended to determine whether all the students and professionals have had a good experience, or if there is damage control to do on behalf of either party. This will eliminate bad feelings and talk among either group that would diminish the program's overall success.

Below is a sample of a successful mentoring program. This PRSSA Chapter developed a "Rules of the Road" to explain the way in which they administered the mentoring program. It clearly outlined how the student and the professional would define what they anticipated out of the mentoring and give it an opportunity to develop along individual needs. See the example below as a possible approach that you can use for your Chapter.

I hope each of you is as excited as Ellen and I are about the opportunities the mentoring program can provide you. It is your chance to begin to network and build upon the classroom experience that you are getting at the USA University. Each of the professionals has agreed to participate, but it is your responsibility to contact them to get your mentoring program started and to determine what type of mentoring program will best fit your needs.

There are no requirements or expectations for the mentor program, other than your own. It is up to you to contact the professional to which you have been assigned and discuss what your plans/expectations are for the semester. Here are some options to consider:

- A breakfast, lunch or coffee meeting to discuss the public relations profession with your mentor (several of you might want to combine with other professionals and students to maximize this opportunity)
- Visit/tour your mentor's workplace and discuss their role in public relations
- Shadow your mentor for a day on his/her job
- Weekly phone calls or emails that provide an opportunity for you to get answers to questions you may have about the public relations profession
- Review your writing samples, resume or portfolio and ask for their professional opinion and recommendations on improvement
- Request that your mentor help identify other public relations professionals that work in areas of PR that you are interested in

At the end of the first 30 days, we will send each of you and your mentors a survey to determine what is and is not working with this approach. At that time, we may reassign students/mentors, add new dimensions to the program, or continue the program without change throughout the semester. At the end of 60 days, we will conduct a final survey to see if there is sufficient value from both students and mentors to implement a Fall Semester program.

Please contact your mentor early and determine the level of involvement and contact that you would like to have in order for all of us to provide for the best experience. Let me know if you have any questions or comments. Most importantly, have a great time!

From interns to first jobs, the help is the key

To match up the students with what is "To Be."

Every student is at a different level in his/her education and making career decisions. Understanding what the real world is like, the potential job market and gaining some on-the-job training is the best way to decide what type of PR is right for them.

Internships

Work with the college to identify new internships and companies in the community that would interest the students. Use the PRSA Chapter members to investigate the PR function at that company and determine if they might be interested in an intern. Often, companies do not offer internships solely because they haven't been asked.

The professional community has the network and contacts to shortcut this process and find out if opportunities are available. In addition, many times a company that has sponsored an internship will be more willing to participate if a fellow professional is there to guide them through the process.

Mentoring Fair

Many PRSA Chapters hold "mentoring" fairs (similar to a job fair) for students. Employers set up tables and talk to students about internship opportunities at their firms. The event enables students to enhance their interviewing skills and allows professionals to recruit talent.

Public Service Projects

Identify public service projects that the PRSA Chapter and the PRSSA Chapter can work on jointly. The interaction will build relationships and create an ideal way for students to get on-the-job training along side professionals. From the planning to the execution and evaluation, students will be a part of the team, absorbing the information and watching the implementation. There's no better way to build a strong relationship than to work along side someone helping the community.

Career Counseling

Develop a network of local professionals that specialize in various areas of PR. Then, refer students to the PR professional best suited to address his/her questions or shared interests.

Recognize each volunteer and include him/her in correspondence or a directory produced by your Chapter. The students will be able to have a tangible listing of all professionals in their region, and in turn, those professionals, can use this directory to demonstrate their commitment to employers and, in many cases, the retention of their APR (Accredited in Public Relations) status.

Just lay out the steps and then follow your plan

Get to know all the pros, do all that you can.

Attendance at PRSA Chapter meetings and functions

Encourage your Chapter members to attend the local PRSA Chapter monthly meetings before they begin to search for jobs. Establishing relationships before asking for assistance works not only in all areas of PR (media relations, community relations, etc.), but also for job searches.

Encourage students to get to know the professionals (what they do, who they work for, the type of PR they have experienced) and build their network of contacts. This will give them firsthand knowledge of the value of PRSA membership, which many graduates miss out on in their early careers.

PRSSA Students Hospitality Table

Some Chapters have asked a couple of the PRSSA students to attend each of their professional meetings to handle the hospitality desk. This entails taking the money for the meeting, providing name tags, directing people to their seating, etc. It gives the students an opportunity to meet each PRSA professional, know where they work and have an initial “ice breaking” conversation to help bridge the barrier that many students feel in associating with the professionals.

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Seek opportunities to hold meetings and social outings for the students and the professionals to encourage interaction outside the formal meeting or internship structure. This will assist in developing relationships that will encourage other ways to build between the professionals and the students. Consider a joint meeting at a local tourist attraction, with a short program on how they do their media relations or promotion. This will provide education and entertainment in a more conducive environment for getting to know others.

E-mail us your own Chapter ideas to <prssa@prsa.org> and we'll post them on the PRSSA Web site (www.prssa.org). The "best practices" will continue to serve as a resource for Chapters to provide ways to continually improve the relationships between local PRSSA and PRSA Chapters.

Good luck!

Oh, the Things You Can Do!!

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