



Dear PRSSA members:

In 2005, members of the National Committee adopted the Diversity Initiative. The Diversity Initiative states PRSSA encourages its Chapters to recruit and retain a diverse membership and leadership that represents the demographic composition at their college or university. Today, there is a growing commitment to promoting diversity in the field of public relations. Although there is a lack of diversity within the membership of the Society, the election and instillation of the 2007-2008 National Committee is a direct reflection of the change and progress towards diversity within the Society's leadership.

Former Vice President of Advocacy Lisa Travnik created and drafted a Diversity Toolkit to provide a guideline for Chapters to support diversity and diverse issues on their campus. The Toolkit has been finalized and is ready for distribution for the 2007-2008 school year. The enclosed toolkit contains information for Chapters to follow in order to promote diversity on their campus. The Diversity Toolkit is not a solution for inequality or injustice on college campuses; however, the toolkit does address common problems with diversity and offers suggestions on how Chapters can become socially sustainable.

Please understand PRSSA does not suggest affirmative action or other racial profiling systems as a practice for member recruitment. The Society respects and values all members' personal contributions and talents regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities and religion.

We as future public relations professionals need to be aware and understand key publics and how people with differences work and communicate effectively. By having a Society full of diverse leaders, we can build stronger professional and personal relationships within our industry and our communities.

Please read carefully through the materials in this packet and reevaluate the practices of your Chapter such as recruitment, retention, and member satisfaction and how these practices may be improved by implementing a diversity initiative.

Thank you for your cooperation and assistance with this matter. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact [brandi.boatner@gmail.com](mailto:brandi.boatner@gmail.com). Have a wonderful school year!

Sincerely,

Brandi Boatner  
PRSSA Vice President of Advocacy  
2007-2008 National Committee  
Hawai'i Pacific University

# PRSSA DIVERSITY TOOLKIT

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## **Section 1: Contents**

The following toolkit aims to improve members' overall understanding of diversity within PRSSA and to serve as a template for Chapters in recruiting, understanding, supporting, maintaining and promoting diversity on their campus or university.

### **1.1 Introduction**

The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) is dedicated in its efforts to welcome and maintain a diverse membership. We embrace members regardless of socio-economic background, race, culture, religion, education, age, disability, marital status, gender or sexual orientation.

### **1.2 Diversity Initiative (2007)**

PRSSA supports the diversity initiative of PRSA and encourages its Chapters to recruit and retain a diverse membership and leadership that represents the demographic composition at their college or university.

Each PRSSA Chapter across the nation should evaluate and consider what it will do to support the PRSSA policy on diversity. Chapters should also use the Diversity Toolkit as a guide to help promote and support diversity on their campus.

#### **The objectives of the Diversity Initiative for 2007-2008 are as follows:**

- 1.) To reevaluate the PRSSA diversity survey to gauge members' attitudes, beliefs and demographics regarding diversity, as well as the demographic makeup of the general membership.
- 2.) To incorporate diversity into all Regional Activities
- 3.) To continue a FORUM column focusing on diversity
- 4.) To create a national award recognizing diversity efforts- "The Diversity Teahan Award"
- 5.) To introduce the Diversity Toolkit and assist Chapters with applying the principles within their Chapters

The Vice President of Advocacy and the Society's National Committee members are currently working to accomplish the above objectives by May 2008.

### **1.3 Official Position on Diversity**

PRSSA recognizes the importance of different experiences, perspectives and voices in making a viable society that aids the profession and future professionals serving diversified and increasingly multicultural publics. Furthermore, all PRSSA members are called and expected to uphold the pillars of professionalism, advancement and ethical behavior as clearly defined in the PRSA Code of Ethics, so as to ensure a noble progression of advocacy through the public relations field.

## **Section 2: Understanding Diversity**

### **2.1 Defining Diversity**

#### **What Is Diversity?**

The term “diversity” suggests a variety of categorical definitions such as race, nationality, gender or sexual orientation. PRSSA expands this definition to mean any differences that exists among people. Diversity can be divided into primary and secondary dimensions. Primary characteristics are those that are innate and cannot be changed such as gender, age, ethnicity, race, nationality and sexual orientation. Secondary characteristics are those that can be altered which include marital status, education (major/minor), religion, and geographics.

In this age of globalization, the public relations profession addresses a wide variety of topics and it is important that the Society represents diversity among its members in order to effectively communicate with the student body and with future publics.

The current demographic of the Society consists primarily of Caucasian females. To better serve members and our publics, it is beneficial to recruit other individuals who may bring a fresh perspective to our membership. The following groups are helpful to recruit for new members:

- Men
- Students in related communication fields, such as advertising, journalism, marketing or business; also students in non-communication fields such as political science, nursing etc.
- Members of ethnic and cultural minority groups
- International students
- Students with disabilities
- Student athletes
- Members of the LGBT campus community

Please understand PRSSA does not suggest any type of affirmative action or other racial profiling system for member recruitment. The Society respects and values all members’ personal contributions and talents regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities and religion. We aim to manage and value diversity in order to include members of nontraditional backgrounds in our organization.

### **2.2 The Role of Diversity in PRSSA**

Beyond race and religion, diversity refers to a variety of characteristics. PRSSA defines its role in diversity as follows:

*To expand the objectives of this Society while actively recruiting and retaining members who can offer a variety of experiences through a broad spectrum of racial, ethnic, religious and sexual-orientation groups. The Society aims to*

*encourage the educational success of our members in order to provide the professional world with educated, diverse students to form strong and effective relationships with a multicultural, global society*

The initiative focuses on diversity on a variety of levels. A mix of individuals from different experiences can enhance the way we prepare our members to serve diverse key publics. We also hope to expand these efforts in the coming years in order to affect and change the makeup of the professional world. Although there is the obstacle of having a lack of diversity in the public relations field, our efforts can continually improve the future of our profession.

PRSSA emphasizes the benefits that diversity can generate such as maximized productivity, deeper thinking, greater commitment to racial understanding, acceptance of others, creativity and truly meeting the needs of diverse consumer groups.

### **2.3 Diversity vs. Culture**

PRSSA would like to manage diversity and change the culture of our organization. We want to not only create and promote diversity, but also understand and appreciate it as an asset to our members and our publics. Often diversity is mistaken for culture because certain aspects of diversity such as race and nationality do have their own culture.

To help understand the differences:

<b>Culture</b>	<b>Diversity</b>
Norms	Characteristics
Beliefs & Values	Innate traits
Determines behavior	Can control behavior
Can create conflicts in communication styles	Proactive integration of multiple cultures to decrease conflicts

### **2.4 Maintaining Diversity**

#### **The SIIP Method**

#### **Survey Identify Implement Personalize**

Before implementing a diversity plan, a Chapter must survey and evaluate the existence of diversity that may already exist within the Chapter (or lack thereof). This is not simply a head count of men, women and different races. This means taking a look at your Chapter and thinking about how it represents your campus student body, our organization, your state and the rest of the country. What area does your Chapter lack in membership and why? How can you remedy the areas in which you lack?

### **STEP 1: SURVEY**

An evaluation should be done with a fairly large group of members. Depending on the size of the Chapter, members could spend a meeting conducting a brainstorm session asking the above-mentioned questions. Members of the executive board will not be able to do a fair analysis about how members truly feel within the Chapter. Chapters must get individual members involved in the discussion in order to get accurate feedback. New members are especially valuable in determining why they joined PRSSA and why the Chapter has a current retention rate.

### **STEP 2: IDENTIFY**

Identify specific challenges and opportunities for your Chapter's diversity initiative and share these facts with all Chapter members. By showing members the benefits of membership, Chapter leaders can gather support for recruiting others to join the organization. Diversity can sometimes be a sensitive subject, and some students may be hesitant to discuss or share their opinions. However, certain issues within the Chapter pertaining to diversity must be addressed in order to clearly and openly define and evaluate how a diverse membership will be a valued aspect of the Chapter.

### **STEP 3: IMPLEMENT**

After surveying the chapter and identifying the challenges and opportunities, the next step is implementation. Start an open dialogue with your Chapter and the national vice president of advocacy about your plans and progress. What are your specific needs and goals? How do you plan on reaching those goals? Will this be a short or long term project? What is your progress in reaching your goals?

### **STEP 4: PERSONALIZE**

For PRSSA Chapters, much of the diversity initiative focuses on recruitment. Members should appeal to the needs of non-traditional groups on campus in order to establish a relationship with the members of those groups for recruitment purposes. Once these relationships have been established, the Chapter must then find a way to personalize a local diversity initiative.

## **2.5 The Value of Diversity**

It is extremely important for Chapter leaders to show a strong commitment to diversity in order to gain member support. One option for supporting a diversity initiative within a chapter is to elect a diversity or advocacy chair. Another option would be to also create a diversity subcommittee to provide support within the Chapter.

Form partnerships and relationships with multicultural groups on campus to work together in order to achieve and accomplish Chapter goals and objectives. Try to co-sponsor a diversity-focused event with other organization. Invite diverse panels of speakers to attend your meetings.

Once the Chapter initiates these programs, continue to reevaluate and change your Chapter's plan. Observe what has been successful and what has been unsuccessful or still

lacking diversity. Also, research local outside resources to incorporate diversity into overall Chapter programming themes.

Diverse campus environments have a significant positive effect on the current generation of college students. To be effective leaders the Society must convey respect the entire student body and reevaluate the patterns of relationships on our campus.

### **Section 3: Diverse Programming**

The PRSA Advocacy and Diversity sections are great resources for developing ideas for diverse programming and events. The following are a sample of programming ideas and topics that were provided from PRSA Chapters and Districts throughout the nation.

Please contact the PRSSA vice president of advocacy for additional help and details about the Diversity Initiative. Chapters may also contact Donna Jonas, PRSA Diversity Committee Liaison at 212-460-1403 or [donna.jonas@prsa.org](mailto:donna.jonas@prsa.org).

#### **3.1 Sample Programming Ideas & Events**

- **Communicating across cultures**  
Our language is filled with colloquialisms, colorful ways of speaking, and metaphors; it is part of what makes the English language so interesting. But some of these words and phrases can be hurtful to people of certain ethnicities, religious or other groups without the sender realizing it.  
  
Co-sponsor a writing and language workshop with journalism students or the Press Club on your campus to check-up and review some of the ways people inadvertently use offensive words – or other ways of communicating – and suggest more appropriate ways to get your message across.
- **School Spirit**  
Co-sponsor a workshop with student athletes and the media relations office of the athletics department on your campus. Discuss at the workshop how your university's sports teams are being promoted and how student athletes feel about their image and the image of the university's athletics.
- **Greek Life: Image is Everything**  
Host a workshop with fraternities and sororities identifying topics such as reputation management, crisis communication and publicity/public relations. Most Greek organizations do have public relations officers or programming chairs. Your PRSSA Chapter could offer suggestions on how to best communicate their organization's message to the student body.
- **Major Fair**

Host a communication or business major fair for students to really get an understanding of public relations, advertising, marketing and journalism major. Invite professors to talk about their respective field/major and offer students and members the chance to meet students of the different majors.

- **Students with Disabilities**  
Co-sponsor an event with the Center for Students with Disabilities on your campus. The event could be a partnership with an existing organization in your area such Light House for the Blind or Special Olympics. Your Chapter could also generate awareness about the Center for Students with Disabilities by offering public relations services such as news releases, campus email or sponsoring students with disabilities week on campus.
- **Understanding Lifestyles**  
Stage a roundtable discussion with LGBT campus organizations and your PRSSA Chapter. Create an awareness and understanding of students with alternative lifestyles among your student body.
- **Empowering Women**  
Invite faculty from the women's studies department on your campus as well as local female businesswomen to discuss the promotion of women in corporate America companies and how it affects the diversity of a corporation.
- **Language & Communication**  
Do Hispanic audiences really prefer Spanish to English? What is the preferred language by Chinese-Americans? How many dialects do Chinese-Americans speak and which is most politically correct to use in public relations? Host a guest speaker series co-sponsored with a campus organization for international students that addresses these questions in regards to language and communication both on campus and off-campus in the local community.
- **The Story Within the Story**  
A workshop where professionals describe a "crisis" they faced within an ethnic market (i.e. Nike racial discrimination suit). Attendees must offer solutions for the crisis before the real solution is presented.
- **Challenges of Diversity**  
Partner with your area's largest public and private employers to discuss the different diversity challenges they have faced, and specifically, those relating to communications.
- **Working with Ethnic PR**  
Ask corporate/governmental practitioners to be guest speakers on your campus to discuss how they work with ethnic PR agencies, ethnic initiatives, and ethnic campaigns.

- **Diversity and Human Resources**  
Work with your campuses' Office of Human Resources to create a program that discusses employee communications and communicating with diverse employees on campus. Also, partner with a local HR organization (i.e. Society for Human Resource Management) in your area and invite them to speak about the experiences they have had with employee relations and diversity in local companies.
- **Emerging Markets**  
Host a discussion with your local PRSA Chapter that is open to the campus and addresses emerging markets within your community. Discuss the different opportunities the emerging markets can provide. For example, there is a growing Hispanic community in Kansas and that Chapter is considering a program to address the specific needs of the market.
- **Ethnic Radio**  
This is a powerful and often overlooked medium. It is often the major source for news and information among immigrant communities in major cities. Try to identify ethnic radio markets in your area and invite members of the station to speak to your Chapter regarding the issue of ethnic radio.
- **Perceptions**  
What are the changes experienced by today's ethnic communities? Hold a discussion regarding issues of perceptions of certain ethnic groups and how to communicate when differences exist. Invite diversity officers from area businesses to be guest speakers.

These are just a few topics you can cover to bring the value of diversity to your members. Reach out to your local PRSA Chapter or PRSSA National Vice President of Advocacy Brandi Boatner ([brandi.boatner@gmail.com](mailto:brandi.boatner@gmail.com)) for more ideas and to discuss how these programs will work for your Chapter.

Best of luck with creating, building and maintaining diversity on your campus!