

Memo

To: Communication Department Advisors

From: John Luecke

Date: October 15, 1998

Subject: Choice of minors for public relations students

Here are some suggested minors that have worked reasonably well with public relations students in the past. None of these will guarantee employment, but they seem to make sense to me.

Marketing:

This is a real sound choice since the line between public relations and marketing continue to cross in the professional world. It's also a choice that allows students to pursue a career in sales and marketing. The minor requires 21 credits of marketing courses. Many public relations students in other colleges are lucky to take one or two marketing courses.

Human Resources:

A good combination for students interested in employee communications or employee benefits - we all know how hard they are to explain.

Finance:

A good choice for students who are adept with words and numbers. Career possibilities include shareholder relations for publicly held companies, working in PR firms that specialize in financial PR, or doing public relations for financial services organizations.

Management:

I view this minor as an acceptable, but not outstanding, choice for PR students. It won't hurt them, but it's not as directed or content-specific as other choices. For the student who is generally clueless about direction, it's not a bad choice.

Political Science or Public Administration:

Ideal minor for students who want to work on political campaigns, work for elected officials or work in the public information function of a government agency.

Advertising:

We have a number of public relations majors who have chosen a minor in advertising. I have mixed feelings about this one. On one hand, the PR/advertising mix should make the student attractive to agencies - many of which offer both public relations and advertising services to their clients. On the other hand, both the PR and advertising curricula are very skill driven. I'd like to see our students get a broader view of the world.

Multimedia:

The multimedia minor provides students with the appropriate theoretic, aesthetic and technical skills necessary for their success as multimedia creators and developers. Today, multimedia developers are highly in demand in fields of advertising, public relations, publishing, electronic media, training, and development and marketing. Resources available at UW-Whitewater include a wide array of multimedia software and hardware. Students in multimedia develop skills in using Photoshop, Dreamweaver, Flash, Premiere, and other industry-standard multimedia applications.

Health:

This minor works well for students who want to pursue a career in hospital or health care public relations or marketing. As the nation's health care climate continues to change, I suspect demand for PR professionals with health-related knowledge will expand.

Coaching:

This is an ideal minor for sports enthusiasts. It can lead to career tracks in sports information or sports marketing. Most professional sports organizations have a PR function, as do college sports programs.

Graphics:

We have a strong graphics minor which can be beneficial to PR students who want to represent design houses and sell graphics to advertising and public relations professionals. I also feel that a strong graphics background will make them better PR practitioners because they will see more than the words.

English Writing:

Some of our most successful PR students have been English Writing minors. I suspect their initial success in the field is due to the additional 12 credits of writing courses they took from the English Department. They develop greater capability with the language - and that's a highly desired skill for entry-level PR professionals.

Safety:

Many companies have safety programs in order to demonstrate compliance with government regulations and to protect employees from hazardous situations. Communication plays a major role in the implementation of corporate safety programs. We've also had some PR/safety students find employment with insurance companies. Written and oral communications skills are a significant job skill are a significant job skill.

Psychology/Sociology:

I personally believe that a greater understanding of social science is valuable for public relations students - especially since much of what we do is based on social science. Will it lead to a job - not likely, except for students who are interested in doing public relations for social service agencies. In these cases, an in-depth knowledge of social problems and issues could be very attractive to a prospective employer.

Leadership/Military Service:

The U.S. military is one of the nation's largest employers of public relations professionals and, until recently, ran one of the most sophisticated public relations schools. The military also requires all officers (our former ROTC students) to have a secondary occupational specialty - it might as well be public relations. Their first military specialty usually involves the art of warfare.

History:

Yes, you can combine a public relations major with a history minor - especially if the student is interested in working for historical societies, museums, etc. Some large corporations employ historians or archivists to document the development of the organization. These people are sometimes affiliated with the public relations department.

The Sciences:

This should be a good combination for the student who is interested in the sciences, but doesn't want to be a scientist. Scientific research groups and businesses whose products or services are science driven could be attracted to a graduate with this combination. Some PR agencies specialize in working for scientific clients.

The Arts:

Most arts organizations also have a public relations function; however, our students may do better by taking the arts management or arts merchandising major. I believe both of these majors require many of our public relations course.

Foreign Language:

Some students believe that by combining public relations with foreign language they'll be well positioned for a career in international public relations. I'm skeptical. I'm personally convinced that we've written far more about international PR than we really know about it. Public relations is a uniquely American phenomena, although it's certainly practiced in other countries. The current approach is to employ public relations practitioners who are native to the target country. This is a minor that may not hurt, but I'd doubt that it will automatically open career doors. The exception may be Spanish, especially as the U.S. Hispanic population continues to grow faster than any other minority group, and as Hispanic seem to show greater affinity for their language and culture than previously assimilated groups.

The bottom line - encourage your advisees to select a major that will help differentiate them from the hundreds of other public relations grads who will be going after the same number of limited entry-level positions.