



2023

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS



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INTRODUCTION

To study and understand the decrease in PR students, we have conducted two focus groups made up of fourteen University of Florida students. One of the focus groups was made up of PR students and another was made up of students in majors like advertising and environmental science. The PR focus group was asked their opinions and feelings about the department and classes provided, specifically PUR3000. The non PR focus group was asked about their knowledge of PR and the factors they take into consideration when choosing their major.

We also sent out a Qualtrics survey where we received 68 responses and 80% of respondents had majors outside of the CJC. The goal of this survey was to get quantitative data about student's perspectives and knowledge of public relations.

Below you will find our insights and understanding of the research done by our team last semester.



#1

THE VERSATLITY OF PR

Summary: The PR participants unanimously expressed that public relations is a versatile subject area. They said they felt that public relations is applicable to many different industries, and each participant named a different career path they wanted to pursue in the future. Participants view this as a positive attribute to studying public relations, and for two of them, it was the reason they opted to study public relations.

Quotes and Observations: The moderator asked participants why they chose public relations as their major. One participant is a transfer student who knew she wanted to study something related to communications, so she considered all the CJC majors. She said, "I felt like out of all four of the majors, it (public relations) was, like, the broadest, I guess, and I could do a lot with it."

During this same discussion, another participant said, "I like how general it (public relations) is. You really can do anything."

When asked what they like best about their PR coursework, one participant said she loved the "freedom for creativity" her classes permitted. "I don't think I have done any projects in my PR coursework where it was just kind of, you had to follow the instructions to the tee," she said.

"There's definitely been situations where professors have allowed me to kind of venture out of what was specified."

When asked what type of public relations they wanted to pursue in the future, participants gave a wide variety of answers. Answers included healthcare communications, fashion PR, public interest communications, social media and attending law school. Participants listened to one another respectfully and seemed excited when someone shared their goals for the future.

Takeaway: Public relations is a versatile subject, and this is seen as an advantage to students who have chosen PR as their major.

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#2 RESOURCES

Summary: Participants had space to praise or criticize the resources given to them by the PR department. Although not everyone commented on this topic there were some participants who were ready to share their opinion on the different resources.

Quotes and Observations: The moderator asked participants who had switched their major what they liked the most about the public relations major so far and participants pointed out a variety of things. One participant said, "The building itself looks small, but there are so many organizations within it that you can be a part of." In addition, this participant mentioned receiving emails with opportunities and a variety of things to do.

During this same discussion, another participant agreed and added details about her experience in HPRSA stating that "It's really exciting we're able to be a part of that."

On the other hand, when asked about what they disliked about the public relations major, two participants felt like the resources in the CJC in order to get an internship are limited. A participant stated,

"I feel like there are small opportunities here and there...but no real resources."

This participant expands on her peer who attends another university "of an equal or even higher caliber and they have people in every week speaking to us and trying to hire us for internships." Another participant agrees with the point above. As a transfer student, she has been finding it challenging to get an internship with so little PR experience.

"I feel like there is a leap between giving us a database and actually helping us to meet up with a company."

There were mentions of having to stand out from thousands of applicants and participants agreed connecting with companies would be helpful to network.

Advising was also briefly mentioned towards the end by a transfer student who was online at first and found it challenging to reach out to advising.

Takeaway: Public Relations is a field where experience matters and students understand that. Although there wasn't a pattern in responses about the resources given to PR students, some found organizations a helpful place to get experience and others asked for more resources to gain experience.



INSIGHT #3: INTERNSHIPS



Summary: When asked about what students disliked about the PR major two participants spoke up about opportunities for internships being more scarce than they had initially expected. There are acknowledgments of resources that are provided but they mentioned it doesn't feel like enough.

Quotes and Observations:

- One participant felt that they weren't given the tools necessary to access eligible internships. They felt that although it is an expectation, they don't know where to begin their search. "I at least haven't really seen any push to do internships or not to do internships, because of course, they always tell you like, oh, like do an internship, but no real resources."
- Another participant added that the resources were somehow helpful but "it's hard for me to kind of feel like, okay, I'm gonna have an actual chance of getting this job or something like that."

Takeaway: There is an understanding of certain resources that exist in order to acquire internships for PR students, but given that PR relies on many experiences there is a growing worry in students about getting their first internship.

#4 ADVISING

Summary: The moderator asked the participants of the focus group for non-majors how they came to find their current majors. One participant, an advertising major, noted that in addition to the environment of the college, the j-school advisors played a prominent role in the decision. Another participant in the same group added that they switched to their major with the help of an advisor. The moderator also asked the participants of the focus group for majors what they dislike about the public relations major at the University of Florida, to which one of the participants responded with advising issues.

Quotes and Observations:

“

I was interested in the major and I really liked the advisors and I really liked the staff and the advisors and the J-school in general.”

”

“Yeah, for me I was more interested in a lot of the research in the UF catalog and then I contacted my advisor to see if I could switch into [the major].”

“

I don't like the way advising is handled where you, like, have to drop in to be able to do it...I think that there should be better advising opportunities than just like you have to wait there to be seen in this certain timeframe because I feel like it excludes a lot of people. I did see that they're doing it online now...and there's only so much you can get done through email.”

Takeaway: There is a mixed response surrounding advising, which can arguably be attributed to what services students are looking for. Advisors seem to be most helpful when students are considering switching their majors. For more in-depth questions and concerns students may have, however, accessibility to those advisors becomes a bigger concern.

#5 COMMUNITY

Summary: The participants said that there is a strong sense of community in the UF public relations program. They described the program as “welcoming” and “motivating.” Aside from just discussing it, the participants in the PR major focus group demonstrated how the PR program has a sense of community while the non-PR major group was less focused on connecting and getting to know one another. Although the non-PR group listened respectfully, the PR focus group was much more friendly to the point that participants ended the session by connecting with one another on BeReal and LinkedIn.

Quotes and Observations:

In the PR majors group, the moderator asked participants what they liked about the public relations major. One participant said, “It's not exclusionary. Like, everyone's, like, always welcoming people.” The participant later said, “Everyone that you talk to is super passionate about the major that they're part of.”

In the PR majors group, the moderator asked participants if they felt like their involvement in PR-related campus organizations affected their feelings toward their major. One participant said, “Yeah, I like it (their major) more because now I have more like-minded people around me to really, like, talk about it with.” Another participant added on by saying, “I feel like it (campus involvement) definitely probably gives you, like, a better sense of purpose because, as she said, there are people around you that are motivating you.”

One participant said it was “motivating” to be speaking with communications students at the focus group. She said she enjoyed hearing about everyone's involvement in PR and that it was “refreshing” to be around people who were purposeful with their words.

Near the end of the PR major focus group, one of the participants noticed the BeReal notification for the day had been sent out. Participants took their BeReal photos with each other during the group.

Participants in the PR major focus group connected with each other on LinkedIn at the conclusion of the discussion.

Takeaway: *There is a strong sense of community in the UF PR program. The students in the program are passionate about it, and that passion spreads to every aspect of their lives. This welcoming and motivating environment full of opportunity is something that differentiates the program from others.*



#6 NAVIGATING THE FUTURE

Summary: Participants of the focus group were asked what information they look for when choosing a major to discover how the department can market itself. In this part of the discussion, students brought up their aspirations and reasoning for picking their major.

Quotes and Observations:

- For the most part, students responded that post-graduate employment was one of their main concerns for choosing a major. One participant said, "For me, it was picking something that aligned with my goals in job employment, but was versatile"
- Another participant chimed in saying it was important to them that they could travel the world with
- Participants mentioned picking PR on purpose because it was the broadest major out of all four in the CJC. "...and so that's kind of the angle that pushed me"

Takeaway: Participants don't really have a visual look at their future. Within PR there is versatility, but with this versatility comes uncertainty. There are students who don't understand or visualize what they can do with a PR degree and helping incoming students understand that can be beneficial.



#7 COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT PR

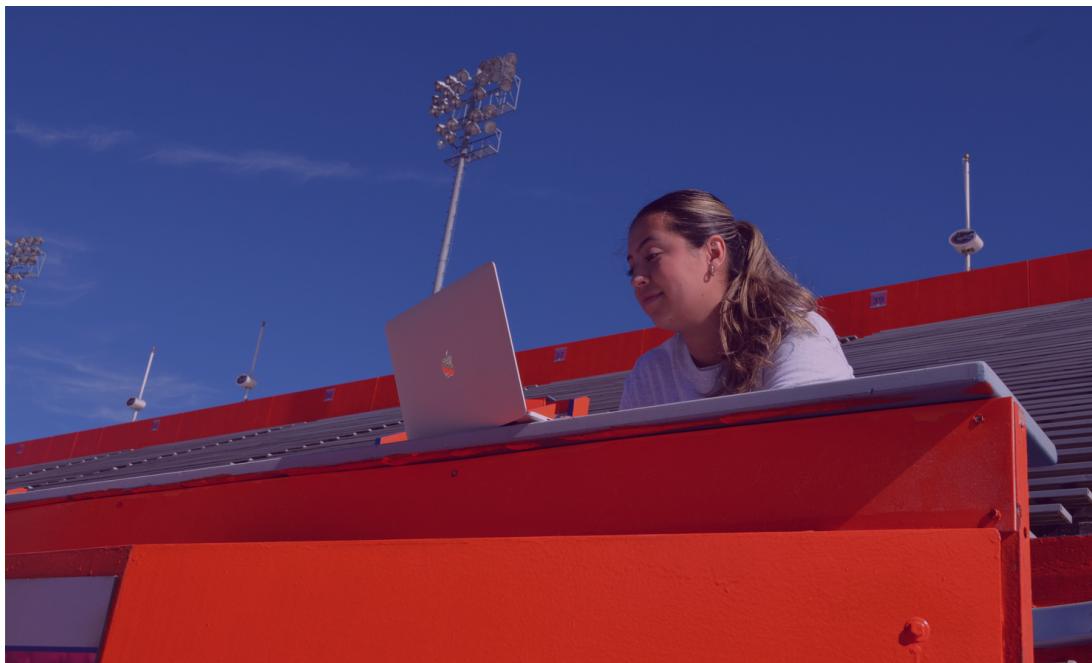
Summary: The moderator asked the non-major focus group about any common misconceptions they might have heard about public relations. One participant brought up the concern about how public relations specialists are portrayed on television and that, while they were not personally exposed to any negative stereotypes, it's becoming clear that this is a popular way of thinking for people who only see the field through the screen. Another participant's response leaned towards communication-related majors as a whole but showed an understanding of how public relations may be seen through that lens. The moderator asked one of the participants of the non-major focus group, who was enrolled in PUR3000 at the time the focus group was conducted if the course helped dispel any of those misconceptions. While the participant did not provide a clear answer to that question specifically, the misconception of low pay was brought up.

Quotes and Observations:

- "If you guys have ever seen the show scandal...the main character, she's, like, a public relations person. And while she's fantastic at her job, they do paint her out to be a wh*re. And I just found out recently that, apparently, that's a stereotype among a lot of TV shows that show public relations people on screen."
- "I feel like sometimes people will tend to, like, negatively stereotype communications majors because I feel like it is perceived as much easier and doesn't require as much effort as other majors. And I haven't taken PR courses, like specifically, I'll be an advertising major, but I can understand where they're coming from. But I do think that, once you're actually in the major, you see, like, a lot more than you would just not actually performing in the class, and there is a lot more that goes into that."
- "I mean, definitely, it shouldn't be that it's like, definitely, it's a certain type of skill, which is like, I guess it seems to focus a bit more on soft skills. It's harder for people to like, and understand the work that goes into it...I did not really understand...the job prospects. So I still couldn't prove to anyone that it wouldn't make money, but I just ended up googling that on my own."



Takeaway: What people see as public relations is a far cry from what the field is actually like. The media seem to paint public relations specialists as promiscuous women, and this seems to be the popular stereotype all across the board for television. Public relations is also grouped with communications as a whole, which means that the further people are distanced from the communications field, the less likely they are to recognize the complexities of public relations work. Additionally, it is believed that public relations specialists are not well-paid. The survey conducted supports the last two observations, as the top two responses to the question of common misconceptions participants had heard about public relations were that the jobs do not pay well (7 people) and that public relations is only about social media (5 people).



INSIGHT #8: PUR3000 VALUE



Summary: Both focus groups found PUR3000 really helpful in understanding what PR is and creating a strong foundation. Some of the transfer students in the PR major focus group even attributed their decision to major in PR to PUR3000.

Quotes and Observations:

- When asked about their current understanding of PR and how much PUR3000 contributed to it one participant said her knowledge “went up from zero a lot.” This same participant explained her understanding was extensive enough to answer her own questions or do more research on PR
- Another participant contributed by stating PUR3000 created a solid foundation by setting up the theories PR practitioners use on the job.

Takeaways: The PUR3000 course in itself is helpful to students interested in PR and those who don't know what public relations are. By taking this course students will be exposed to enough to truly decide their interest in it or not which means making this course accessible or promoting it will be helpful in getting more students to switch their major.