



Final Report

Fall 2024 - Spring 2025

Prepared for:
The University of Florida
Public Relations Department



Meet the Team

Thank you for working with us!



Crystal Smith
Account Supervisor



Paula Lamus
Account Executive



Eden Wright
Account Executive



Ella Fedewa
Account Executive



Ava Maule
Account Executive



Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Undergraduate Research	4
Undergraduate Research S.W.O.T. Analysis	10
Alumni Research	12
Alumni Research S.W.O.T. Analysis	21
Limitations and Looking Forward	23



ABSTRACT

During the Fall 2024 and Spring 2025, the University of Florida's Public Relations Department hired Alpha PR to conduct primary research to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the program in terms of its faculty, academic rigor, resources, extracurriculars and career readiness. The team met weekly to strategize, conduct research and analyze the results from various UF PR students and alumni.



Undergraduate Research

To better understand how the University of Florida PR Department can enhance students' academic experience through the lens of current students in the PR program, our research team conducted two focus groups. One group consisted of freshmen and sophomores, and the other group consisted of seniors, to see how opinions of the program changed over time.

Freshmen and Sophomores Focus Group Report

Methodology

The focus group, consisting of freshmen and sophomores, was conducted on Nov. 5, 2024, at 5:15 p.m. in a conference room within Weimer Hall, and it lasted around one hour and 15 minutes. To recruit participants, our research team had one-on-one discussions with classmates in courses such as Principles of Public Relations and Crisis Communications; asked PR professors to make verbal and/or written claswide announcements about the focus group; and distributed flyers around the College of Journalism and Communications. There were 11 attendees total, all majoring in PR who did not hold an executive board member position in a PR organization. Eight participants were sophomores and three were freshmen.

Themes

When asked why they chose this degree, many of the participants mentioned its focus on communication, creative opportunities and promising career prospects. The most **attractive part of the degree was its versatility**, which allows students to pursue various careers within the industry. Further, participants mentioned UF's reputation as a deciding factor for them, emphasizing that being a part of a highly ranked program would aid in finding a job post-graduation. However, a key takeaway was that not a single student cited UF's PR program as their reason for attending. The students discovered and transitioned into the highly ranked program while already attending the university.

Undergraduate Research

Continued

Participants emphasized their **enthusiasm for beginner courses such as Principles of Public Relations in building their foundational knowledge in** the field of PR. A participant said, “She's been making an effort to diversify. So, we've had someone from, like, global internal comms, sports communication, [and] just international crisis comms.” Further, students shared that after taking Principles of Public Relations with Christine Bucan, they decided to switch into PR. However, students also described a desire for more hands-on learning opportunities in PR, such as projects or skill-building workshops, to gain practical experience early in their careers. While speaking on courses, participants noted that certain general education and CJC courses felt disconnected from their goals in PR. They expressed their need for more PR-focused courses in the early stages of learning, which would allow them to better connect classroom learning to real-world careers.

The **most common concern with courses was the number of required online courses**. Participants expressed their dislike for online coursework by saying they found it less engaging and less effective. A participant said, “I don't have anybody to write a recommendation letter because I'm taking almost all online classes as I couldn't find any in-person. And they're definitely not as engaging as my other in-person classes.” Their statements emphasized the lack of interactive and collaborative components that are crucial for a career in PR. Students believe in-person courses are far more beneficial for building those communication and collaborative skills.

Throughout the study, students emphasized the **value of accessibility to faculty and staff**, who were often described as supportive and willing to provide office hours and additional help with professional development, recommendation letters, and career advice when needed. However, they mentioned that large lecture courses as well as online courses made it difficult to form relationships with professors, especially during their first year at UF. After discussing this, many participants wished they had more opportunities to engage with professors outside of the classrooms.

Undergraduate Research

Continued

Upon discussing extracurricular activities and involvement within the college, students emphasized the value of being involved. They **enjoyed gaining practical experience and enhancing their resumes by participating in PR student organizations** such as PRSSA. They also praised these organizations for offering a variety of networking opportunities and hands-on experience. However, freshmen felt it was too early to participate in certain organizations. Many lacked experience or knowledge about the field, and they expressed concern about the competitiveness of the extracurricular organizations, stating that the organizations preferred students with prior PR experience. A participant said, "I think overall, the competitiveness is kind of crazy. It's just so competitive here that it's hard to dip your toes in the water if you weren't there already." In their opinion, this places a barrier for the underclassmen who are just starting their PR journey.

Students also expressed a **desire for more opportunities to connect with peers and faculty in informal settings**, suggesting more events similar to "Caffeine with the Dean" to foster these connections.

Participants noted that they felt somewhat **underprepared for professional opportunities**. However, they recognized the importance of securing internships and experience. To aid their feelings of underpreparedness, they discussed a desire for more PR-tailored career services that would guide them in the early stages of college. The students noted that a more individualized program could provide more professional and career development resources, such as job shadowing or internship fairs that are more inclusive to underclassmen. Access to this would give them a foundation for building a professional network while gaining more insights into PR career paths early on.

When discussing the program's communication, **participants noted that regular email reminders and social media posts were effective compared to social media stories**. However, some underclassmen have struggled to find career resources and extracurricular opportunities, emphasizing their

Undergraduate Research

Continued

unawareness of opportunities available within the CJC. This was a recurring theme throughout the focus group discussion.

Conclusion

Overall, the insights gathered from the underclassmen focus group show that students are eager to be a PR major for its versatility and engaging professors that students have met in their introductory courses. Limiting online courses would allow students to get more hands-on academic and professional experience in addition to creating entry-level opportunities within student organizations.

Senior Focus Group Report

Methodology

The focus group for seniors took place in a conference room in the Weimer Hall on Nov. 5, 2024, at 3:30 p.m. and lasted nearly one and a half hours, which exceeded our predicted duration. Recruitment efforts were the same as for underclassmen, and our research team continued to seek out participants who did not serve in any executive board positions. Six participants were in attendance with varying interests and projected career paths.

Themes

Many participants expressed that **PR was not their first choice when selecting a major and that the UF PR Department's reputation was not a deciding factor in choosing this major**. Originally, some participants explored majors that aligned with their goal of attending medical or law school; however, they liked how the public relations major would enhance their communication, creativity and strategic thinking skills while suiting their personality needs. A participant noted, "I started off as a political science major because I'm pre-law and that's like the traditional route...I wanted to do something where I could get communication skills to prepare me for public speaking.

Undergraduate Research

Continued

When the moderator asked how the participants' views about the PR Department had changed over time, participants had **mixed reactions to courses offered online versus in-person**. A participant who wished the Department offered more in-person classes said, "...I like them better. I feel like I learn more." The participant added that having in-person classes allows students to interact with the professor and ask for help when needed. Another participant with similar views shared that online courses offer flexibility, but can appear less valuable, stating, "When I've done the online courses, it feels like I'm just doing random assignments just to fill the time or space that an in-person class would take." Another participant added that she liked having online classes, so she can work at her own pace while studying for the LSAT. She said, "As a pre-law [student] studying for the LSAT, it's really time-consuming to leave my house to come to class and then spend all day out to go back — it's really tiring." A participant wished for a happy medium, stating, "I feel there could be a balance...offer two sections like one online and one in person, or in the spring it was online and the fall was in person or something."

Much like the freshmen and sophomores, participants were **impressed with the supportive faculty within the PR Department**. They praised the professors for serving as mentors, providing constructive criticism, sharing expertise from their previous work experience, inviting executive industry professionals, being accessible outside of the class, and expressing compassion. When the moderator asked about what participants liked and disliked about the UF PR program, one of the first things mentioned was the accessibility to the professors. A participant mentioned, "Sometimes, if I email my advisor, it would be at 10:00 at night, and she'll respond to me like 20 minutes later." Another participant agreed by adding, "Every professor I've had has said, 'If you want to send me your resume, please do,' and they've all stuck to it. They'll sit down with you. If you all have Mickey Nall, you know he loves to print it out and grab his red pen, and that's super helpful." When asked about any faculty or courses that stood out to participants, they weren't shy to express that they've been able to interact and connect with executives from large companies.

Undergraduate Research

Continued

One participant said, "We've had the CCO of Walmart come speak to us... and that's really helpful." She added that she has been able to connect on LinkedIn with these professors to build to her professional network. When the moderator reiterated someone's point of the professor caring about his students, a participant said, "Even in the beginning of the first day of class, we didn't go into the syllabus yet, he just wanted us to fill out a paper, basically getting to know us," referring to Jay Hmielowski.

Participants felt that **PR-related extracurricular activities played a crucial role in career preparation**. A participant said, "My biggest regret as a senior is that I didn't get involved...I didn't realize how important it was." However, participants expressed their own barriers to joining PR-related organizations, such as being turned away due to a lack of experience, the cliquey nature of these organizations, time conflicts with meetings, and the desire to situate their academics within the first few years of college before getting involved. On this note, a participant said, "Everything I applied to said 'no' because I was a junior... I was applying to things, and it was like, 'Well, you don't have any other experience,'" she added, "Well, how do I get the experience? This is how I'm going to start." Another participant expressed, "I do feel like some of the student organizations in PR are tight-knit and like they kind of like have their own mojo thing going on... it kind of seems a bit [of a] closed door."

Participants felt **prepared to seek employment due to their coursework**. One participant expressed, "A lot of your coursework is ... you creating a portfolio and actually getting hands-on experience, especially when you take that final campaigns course, and you can put everything together into what you would be working on in the real world. I think it's really helpful." However, seniors felt that the program would have improved on preparing students to enter the competitive job market when it comes to career services. A participant said, "I don't plan on going to grad school, so I have to find a job now and a course that would teach you how to do interviews well or even like networking well. I think that would be a really beneficial course."

Undergraduate Research

Continued

Conclusion

The senior focus group revealed that students were pleased with the flexibility of the PR major, indicating that it builds foundational skills that can be applied across disciplines. However, it was noted that the program's online courses might take away from the student experience and limit exposure to the supportive faculty within the PR Department that can offer professional guidance. On another note, the department offers a good selection of student organizations, but could benefit from making the organizations less competitive for optimal participation. Insights also revealed the program's beneficial coursework in preparing students for the workforce through its ability to simulate work done in the field; however, the department can offer courses tailored to what it takes to land a job (e.g., networking and interviewing skills).



Undergraduate S.W.O.T. Analysis

Strengths

Freshman and Sophomores:

- Strong faculty support: Professors are described by participants as supportive, accessible and willing to provide additional help.
- Introductory courses like Principles of Public Relations are beneficial for foundational skills and have influenced students' decisions to pursue PR.
- Student organizations, such as PRSSA, were recognized for providing hands-on experience and networking opportunities.

Seniors:

- Excellent support from faculty such as Pat Ford, Mickey Nall, etc., who were caring, encouraging and accessible.
- Work samples for a job portfolio from senior-level courses.
- Valuable industry connections from guest speakers who come into PR courses, which build students' professional networks early in their careers.
- Exposure to real clients and the opportunity to work on campaigns through coursework have prepared them for the "real world" of PR.

Weaknesses

Freshmen and Sophomores:

- Participants expressed a desire for more projects, professional development opportunities and skill-building experiences in the early stages of their education.
- Online classes are seen by students as less engaging and effective for developing communication and collaboration skills.
- Limited faculty interaction in large and online courses makes it harder to build relationships that are crucial for mentoring and recommendations.
- Many freshmen feel unqualified or intimidated to join PR organizations due to a lack of experience.

Seniors:

- Too many online classes were offered that weren't as engaging or valuable in a communication-heavy industry.
- The competitive and cliquey nature of student organizations delays involvement, which could prevent students from gaining the experience needed to receive a good job offer.



Undergraduate S.W.O.T. Analysis

Continued

O pportunities

Freshmen and Sophomores:

- Offer professional development workshops, networking opportunities, inclusive career fairs or beginner-level projects tailored to freshmen and sophomores.
- Launch a guide/mentorship program that matches underclassmen with upperclassmen or professionals to support career development early.
- Create more in-person classes for engagement and relationship-building opportunities, especially so underclassmen feel connected to the CJC.
- Improve visibility of resources.
 - Have a required freshman bootcamp, discussing the UF PR program's services and opportunities.
 - Encourage UF PR organizations to create posts about meetings and events rather than stories for a more permanent presence.

Seniors:

- Offer the same course online and in-person to give students autonomy over their schedule and learning experience (e.g., Sight, Sound and Motion).
- Emphasize the importance of internships and integrate internships into the academic experience by making it a graduation requirement.
- Develop career-prep courses that teach students networking and interviewing skills.

T hreats

Freshmen and Sophomores:

- Feelings of exclusion from extracurriculars and professional opportunities could lead to disengagement with the CJC.
- The competitiveness of student organizations could deter newer students and potentially create a divide between upperclassmen and underclassmen.
- Negative experiences with online classes could impact student satisfaction and learning outcomes.
- Lack of initial awareness of the PR program. If students aren't coming to UF for PR it may be due to under-promotion or missed recruitment opportunities.

Seniors:

- Poor preparation, in terms of networking and interviewing, could be a reason for possible unemployment upon graduation.
- Communication through social media stories prevents students from joining clubs or attending meetings because of its time sensitivity.

Alumni Research

To gain a better understanding of how the UF PR Department can enhance the student experience from alumni who have a deeper knowledge of workforce needs, our research team conducted two focus groups. One focus group consisted of 2018 to 2023 alumni, and the other included 2024 graduates to compare how opinions have changed over time.

2024 Graduates Focus Group Report

Methodology

This group consisted of 11 PR students who graduated from UF in the 2024 academic year. To ensure broad participation and accommodate the diverse schedules and locations of alumni, we hosted the focus group on Zoom at 7 p.m. EST on Thursday, March 6. The outreach team connected with alumni through LinkedIn, text messages and emails to find individuals with a wide range of experiences post-graduation.

Themes

The focus group provided valuable insights into several key themes, each shedding light on areas where the UF PR Department could enhance its support and offerings for students. One of the most notable themes discussed was **the importance of participating in extracurricular activities outside of the traditional PR-related clubs**. Several alumni emphasized that their most valuable connections and experiences came from branching out into different areas. A participant shared her experience, saying, "I always wished that they pushed students to go into more clubs that weren't PR-related. Because when all of us are going into PR clubs, we're all fighting for the same positions... if you branch out, that's where all of my connections have come from." She explained that joining groups like Gator Band allowed her to meet people from different disciplines, creating opportunities for networking and professional development that extended beyond the PR Department. Another participant shared this sentiment, emphasizing that the PR Department should encourage students to explore a variety of extracurricular activities, not just those within the PR domain.

Alumni Research

Continued

"I would love the opportunity to connect with alumni groups because I think it's fun," she said. "I feel like everyone can sort of give each other advice, [and discuss] where they are and their experience post-grad." This illustrates a desire for a more integrated approach to extracurricular engagement, where students can gain diverse perspectives and expand their networks beyond their immediate field of study.

Another significant theme was the **gap between academic learning and the practical skills needed for internships and entry-level roles**. Alumni shared their frustrations regarding the lack of real-world application of the knowledge gained during their studies. A participant pointed out, "I wouldn't say anything that I learned in my undergrad actually like was directly applicable to my internship. I honestly learned all of that experience on the job." This sentiment was shared by another participant, who reflected on her internship experience, stating, "Having the gap of what we would actually be doing in an internship or in an entry-level role was kind of a bit of a step back." Several participants echoed the need for more hands-on training, particularly in industry-standard platforms. The alumni agreed that more practical, real-world scenarios—such as learning to use media monitoring tools like Muck Rack and Cision—would better prepare students for their future roles.

The alumni also discussed the **importance of staying connected with the department after graduation, particularly through alumni engagement**. Many participants noted that the primary way they stayed in touch with the department was through social media. "I follow the J-school, I follow ESPN. I think I even still follow JCA on Instagram," one participant shared. However, they expressed a desire for more structured opportunities to reconnect, especially for those who no longer live near campus. Another participant explained, "I wish there was more... just in general, like, 'Oh, how are the alumni doing?'"

Alumni Research

Continued

She mentioned that alumni in cities like New York have stronger networks, with meetups and events that help maintain connections and foster professional growth. One alumni shared a similar experience, noting the difficulty of maintaining connections after graduation, especially when juggling new responsibilities in their careers. "Making that connection still has to be an active effort," she said, underscoring the need for more proactive efforts from the department to keep alumni engaged.

The **role of faculty in maintaining connections with alumni was another significant topic.** Some alumni felt that maintaining relationships with professors after graduation was an individual effort.

Janelle reflected, "Something that I found is... there's always something —like do you want a raise... How would you approach this?" She emphasized that maintaining relationships with professors or mentors could provide valuable guidance, even when not seeking a new job or promotion. This suggests that the department could better facilitate ongoing connections between students and faculty, ensuring that mentorship continues beyond graduation. A participant added that while maintaining personal connections with professors was valuable, the department could do more to help students stay connected with each other. "The network's definitely stronger when you're in New York," he said, highlighting the importance of building a strong alumni community, particularly for alumni in different locations.

Finally, the alumni discussed the **important role that networking plays in securing career opportunities.** They highlighted the importance of developing relationships with individuals outside of the PR Department and building a network of diverse connections. One participant's experience in non-PR organizations exemplified how these connections can often be more beneficial than those made through traditional PR channels.

Alumni Research

Continued

"It came from the different individual things that set me apart from everyone else," she said, underscoring the value of networking beyond the confines of the Department. This theme also emerged in the conversation about alumni connections, with several participants expressing a desire for more networking opportunities and professional development support from the Department. "I think we all know the same people who are all within the field," one participant stated. "So I think it's just really more beneficial to get outside of that when it comes time to trying to get a career."

Conclusion

The insights gathered from the 2024 graduate focus group reveal a need for the UF PR Department to expand its offerings beyond traditional PR clubs and internships. Encouraging students to explore diverse extracurricular activities, providing more hands-on internship preparation, strengthening alumni engagement and fostering mentorship opportunities are key areas where the Department can improve. These changes would not only enhance students' academic experiences but also better prepare them for successful careers post-graduation.

Alumni Research

2018-2023 Graduates Focus Group Report

Methodology

This focus group was comprised of 11 public relations students who graduated from UF between Spring 2018 and Fall 2023. To reach more alumni and comply with their post-grad schedules and locations, we hosted this focus group on Zoom at 7 p.m. EST on Thursday, March 13. The research team implemented the same recruitment efforts as the 2024 graduate focus group.

Themes

Our focus group provided us with several insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the PR program at UF. While overall the 2018-2023 alumni were happy with their time at UF and felt that the PR Department had at least somewhat prepared them for their post-grad careers, there were some identified areas for improvement. The first of these was in relation to **career development**. Many alumni felt that the PR Department should be more represented at career fairs so that students could network with professionals in their industry. One participant felt that the PR Department was left out of several career events, stating that she “felt like a lot of them were very journalism-based. A lot of like radio, literally no PR firms – maybe two.” She continued, saying, “I always felt like the PR kids were getting jipped at the career fairs.” Another participant chimed in with a similar sentiment, stating that “none of my opportunities I found through the career fairs. Maybe through J-school connections, but not at the career fairs.” Still, several felt that networking with professors and guest speakers was important. A participant expressed this saying, “reach out on LinkedIn just to show interest. I feel like that’s the most important thing.” Another participant felt similarly, stating “it was really nice to hear from ... CEO's of companies and like people really high up, which was really cool.”

Another significant insight from this focus group was that **the PR Department, and the CJC in general, has great resources**.

Alumni Research

Continued

One alumna compared the CJC to Wannado City because there are so many experiences available that simulate jobs students may have in the future. Between clubs, classes and immersion experiences, students felt that there was a vast amount of resources to explore and develop their professional skills. One participant was first exposed to these resources before she started school, saying, “when I did my tour there, I was like, wait, these people are really on TV right now, and they're like 18 or 19 years old, allowed to do that. And I did all the immersion experiences, too.” Alumni were not only surprised by the number of resources that provided hands-on experiences through immersion programs like NYCxCJC, the Bateman competition and Alpha PR, but also viewed them as crucial for landing their current jobs. A participant explained this in detail, stating “I'm also pretty confident that I wouldn't have the job that I have today if it was not for that organization (PICSA), the opportunities from the campaign we started and the networking with Professor Bradbery and staying connected with her through that organization.”

Another sentiment shared by focus group participants was that **it is the people who make the PR Department great.** Alumni stated that the professors care about their students and want them to succeed. There was a general sentiment that the professors allowed students to test things out and make mistakes to promote growth and learning. One participant explained this, saying “the support from professors as well — the support but also the hands-off approach ... really letting us and encouraging us to learn and figure it out ourselves. I feel like that does a lot for us in the long term.” In addition, alumni believed that the professors truly loved their jobs and made it an exciting atmosphere for students. Another participant summed this up, saying that “it's the people that really make this department. They love the CJC so much.” When the moderator prompted the participants about what they liked about the PR Department, several professors names were mentioned.

Alumni Research

Continued

These were Pat Ford, Natalie Asorey, Christine Bucan and Angela Bradbery. One participant explained that she felt especially close with Christine Bucan and remains in touch today, stating that “the biggest draw for me was definitely the professors ... Christine was one of those role models for me. While she was teaching at UF, she was also working in PR. That mix between real-world experience and just her overall application in life — I connected with her on a personal level.”

When asked by the moderator what participants might have liked or disliked about the PR Department, conversations about classes came up.

While there were a few classes that stood out to students, many alumni sought increased availability and topics in classes. One participant expressed that she wished there were more industry-specific elective options available during her time at UF, stating “I knew I wanted to work in entertainment. I think they added an entertainment PR class my last semester, but I know that fashion and entertainment are two really big, popular interests for people. It would be nice to have more availability, especially for registration.” In addition, several students struggled to get a spot in industry-specific classes during their time at UF. Another participant explained the difficulty and disappointment she faced, saying “I remember I wanted to take Christine Bucan’s Fashion PR class, and it just never fit in my schedule for all three years. So that was a little bit stressful because I really wanted to take that class — it was something that interested me, and I really wanted to do that post-grad.”

Furthermore, several participants discussed wanting more journalism and media-focused classes. Many of the alumni discussed performing journalism-heavy tasks in their current jobs, such as press releases and copywriting, as well as shifting tasks and formats based on the current media landscape.

Alumni Research

Continued

One participant explained that his current job has trained him to always think about what the journalist wants, but that he wished he had been more prepared for that task in school. “I would have liked to endure maybe lighter torture in another aspect of journalism,” he said. “Just to get more knowledge of what a journalist experiences, how to tailor headlines, subject lines, get readership, emails opened and pitches read.” In addition, another participant discussed how she wished there were more classes focused on social media platforms and when to use them. She expanded on this, saying that “I don’t even think we talked about TikTok when I was there. I wanted to be able to know how to use it to the best advantage—whether it’s for speaking about different things or brand strategy.”

The moderator then asked participants what courses they liked the most, and the alumni agreed that **Reporting and Public Interest Communications are two of the most valuable courses offered by the UF PR department.** Alumni believed that Reporting helped fine-tune their grammar skills and set them up as the go-to person for grammar-related questions at their jobs. While describing her appreciation for Reporting, one participant said, “My grammar is so strong and I didn't realize how strong it was until I started working.” Another participant shared that “It was like a really helpful class when it comes to writing.” Another course that was frequently brought up was Public Interest Communications. Participants felt like this course adequately prepared them for nonprofit and public interest work and considered it one of the most valuable courses they took. One participant was very passionate about the Public Interest Communications class, sharing that “the Public Interest Communications class that I took is literally one of my most favorite things I've ever done in my entire life. I learned so much from my class.”

Another participant agreed, stating that “(PIC) is something that continuously has helped me build skills that I need, especially in my role working with a nonprofit organization, working on advocacy and working in a sort of political environment.”

Alumni Research

Continued

The final insight gained from this focus group was that **alumni wanted to feel more in touch with the PR Department and find ways to connect post-grad**. They expressed their dislike at being asked for donations soon after graduating and stated that the PR Department needed to improve the alumni connections. One participant described this feeling, stating that “they have our numbers now and they just keep — I get like... donation calls and nothing else. Like, I'm not at that point in my life.”

Conclusion

This focus group of 2018-2023 graduates highlights the strengths of the PR Department, such as its invested faculty, expansive resources and core classes. However, it also shows spots for growth, such as expanding the availability of industry-specific classes, which the department has already started to do, bringing more PR agencies to career fairs and creating engaging ways to stay in touch with alumni.



Alumni S.W.O.T. Analysis

Strengths

2018-2023 Graduates:

- Alumni emphasized the program's strong alumni network and community, with many citing how UF connections helped them secure jobs and internships.
- Professors were praised for their real-world experience and personal investment in students' success, especially Pat Ford, who was frequently mentioned as a mentor.
- Alumni valued the versatility of the program, saying it provided transferable skills across PR, marketing, events and even social media roles.

2024 Graduates:

- Students appreciated the range of extracurricular opportunities, which helped them build real-world experience before graduation.
- Faculty support and accessibility were repeatedly praised, especially from professors who were approachable and invested in student success.
- Flexibility in course formats (online, in-person, elective variety) helped students balance internships, jobs and academics effectively.
- The department's community made students feel supported, and many mentioned that classmates and professors became lifelong mentors.

Weaknesses

2018-2023 Graduates:

- Some alumni felt the job search post-graduation was difficult, not necessarily due to the program but because of limited agency recruitment beyond major cities post-COVID.
- There was a perception that the program could be too focused on traditional PR paths, not always showcasing newer or emerging career avenues within digital or analytics-focused roles.
- A few mentioned that while the program prepared them for agency life, it didn't always prepare them for the realities of corporate or non-traditional PR roles.

2024 Graduates:

- Students felt there was an overemphasis on agency careers, with limited exposure to in-house, nonprofit or alternative industry roles.
- Lack of diversity in guest speakers and examples shared in class, often skewing toward glamorous industries like fashion and travel, left gaps in understanding more practical career paths.
- Some students expressed that the program could do a better job of showing the breadth of industries that PR skills can apply to, including fields like construction, museums or technology sales.
- There was a sentiment that certain classes felt disconnected from day-to-day agency work realities, particularly regarding time management and the juggling of client workload.

Alumni S.W.O.T. Analysis

Continued



O pportunities

2018-2023 Graduates:

- Alumni saw an opportunity to strengthen connections with agencies outside the tri-state area, expanding career pipelines beyond New York and D.C.
- Expanding curriculum to include emerging PR fields like data analytics, social listening and influencer strategy could keep the program ahead of industry trends.
- Offering more training in crisis communications and public affairs was suggested as a way to diversify student skill sets further.

2024 Graduates:

- Students suggested expanding partnerships with industries beyond traditional PR, like tech, nonprofits or cultural institutions.
- There's an opportunity to diversify speakers and mentorship opportunities to reflect a broader range of career paths.
- Enhancing support for students interested in freelancing or starting their own businesses could be valuable, given student interest in entrepreneurial paths.
- Providing more guidance on financial realities of PR starting salaries and career progression would set clearer expectations for graduates.

T hreats

2018-2023 Graduates:

- Economic uncertainty and tough job markets were mentioned as external threats, making it harder for new graduates to land positions quickly.
- Remote work policies and agency budget cuts have led to fewer entry-level roles and a narrowed focus on recruiting from major cities.
- Rising burnout concerns from agency life, especially due to demanding workloads and low starting salaries, could deter graduates from staying in PR long-term.

2024 Graduates:

- Students expressed concerns about agency burnout and the sustainability of the workload in agency settings.
- Increasing competition from graduates with specialized skills (like paid media, data analytics) could challenge traditional PR graduates.
- Without exposure to a variety of career paths, students risk feeling boxed into agency roles and may miss opportunities in growing sectors like corporate communications or community relations.

Some of the limitations of the research conducted included:

- Held virtual focus groups for the alumni group instead of an in-person session to truly get a feel of honest answers.
- Only recruited those who were employed, which eliminated the perspective of those who were not.
- Freshmen's views may not be as reliable, considering most had just switched into the PR major or had not gotten far enough into the coursework to develop an understanding.
- Survey data was missing to accompany the focus group findings.

Looking Ahead: how to implement these findings:

Further research

Our research team advises the PR Department to further research those who are unemployed to determine areas where the department might've hindered a student's progress in receiving a job in the communications field. Additionally, the department could benefit from researching those who have opted out of pursuing a career in communications to see if the program at UF was at fault.

Additional work that Alpha PR can help with

Based on what our research team has learned from conducting four total focus groups, Alpha PR can help with the department's engagement with alumni through email campaigns or event planning. Alumni within the focus group mentioned that there was limited communication from the department upon graduating; however, Alpha PR can run email campaigns for upcoming alumni events or gatherings and send out messages around the holidays and share any PR Department wins to maintain and strengthen the department's connections with alumni. Furthermore, Alpha PR can assist in sending out newsletters, emails or posting on the PR Department's Instagram to ensure that current students know about meetings and events taking place within the CJC. Alpha PR can act as a liaison between PR students and PR organizations.



LIMITATIONS AND LOOKING FORWARD

Strategy Implementation

Our research team advises the PR Department to incorporate more opportunities to expose students to various avenues within the communications field in all PR classes and student organizations. Over the past 11 months, the PR Department's LinkedIn page highlighted guest speakers — 18 from in-house and 21 from agencies. Additionally, the department offered eight opportunities throughout the year for students to hear from reporters at Axios and professors in the CJC. Students would benefit from guest speakers who vary in seniority level, from entry to senior level, and type of positions (e.g., those who work in branding, in-house, public affairs, etc.). By diversifying the guest speakers, students will be able to understand the full scope of their degree to seek opportunities outside of the traditional PR route. The department can also offer an online and in-person section for each course, rather than having certain courses only offered online, to allow students to select an educational experience that works best for them. Additionally, creating a required business acumen course — Corporate Communication Essentials — for communicators would benefit students as they enter the workforce and must familiarize themselves with business terminology, especially when entering roles within financial PR.

