

PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATORS CHAPTER – THE NEED FOR MORE DIALOGUES & MAKING OUR PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION WORLD CLASS¹

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The willingness for public relations educators in Malaysia to have dialogues augurs well for the profession. That is, not only to have dialogues among fellow educators but also with students and practitioners. By having regular dialogues with all involved in public relations it is hope that we can ensure that the public relations curriculum and the competencies of our educators and graduates will be further enhanced. In addition, to be always current so as to meet the clients or the industry demand, locally and globally.

As it is, the Public Relations Consultants' Association of Malaysia (PRCA, July 2010) alledged: "... they (our local public relations graduates) are steeped in theory and thin in practical skills, and have to be retrained most of the time. We (PRCA) are not experts in the education system but as the leadership of our respective consulting firms we are responsible for recruiting public relations staff at all levels. The caliber of candidates even at the most senior level are often left wanting." (After what is said by PRCA, it is strange that two of the five judges (Abdul Jalil Hamid and Syed Annuar Syed Ali) for its Malaysia PR Awards 2009 are graduates of the Faculty of Communication and Mass Media Study, UiTM. I have personally taught them. Jalil was a journalism student while Annuar was a public relations student.)

So not strangely, at the same page the PRCA proudly declared: “Our professionals now compete equally with their colleagues, internationally and are highly sought after and well compensated regionally in markets such as Singapore, Hong Kong and China to name a few. Many Malaysians PR professionals are commanding top jobs and dollars in regional markets.”

The statements (July 2010) by the PRCA revealed either that they are confused or not sincere or both in assessing our PR graduates. It maybe PRCA thinks too lowly of our local graduates.

Thus, PR educators in Malaysia should not be disheartened by such disparaging remarks. However, we must take note of all criticism. We must continuously improve our public relations education and training so as to make it of global standard.

Here I would like to report on the findings of the Global Alliance collaborataive study (2008): [A First Look: Analysis of Global Public Relations Education- Curriculum and Instructors](http://www.prsafoundation.org/research.html) (2010) (<http://www.prsafoundation.org/research.html>) from in-depth interviews with public relations educators in 20 countries suggesting that:

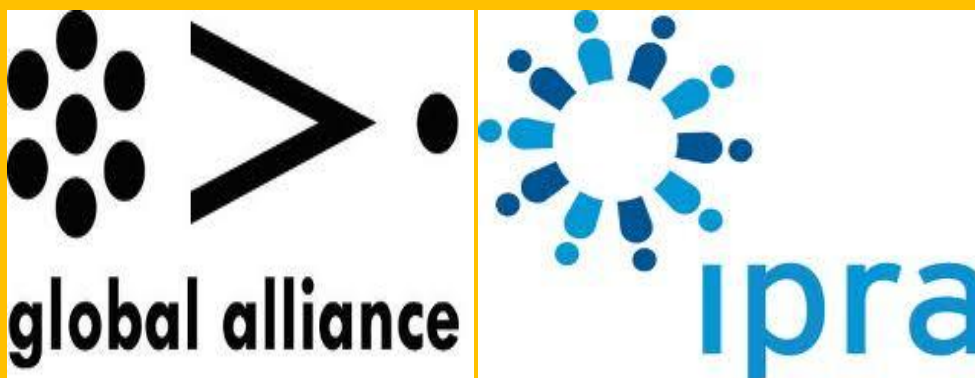
- 1. Most of the educators who were interviewed generally define public relations as the “strategic management of relational communications” and locate it within a social science framework.**
- 2. Undergraduate education programs are practically oriented: they seek to prepare future practitioners by developing requisite technical skills and critical- and strategic-thinking capabilities.**
- 3. Many of the education programs reviewed reflect the five-course standard that’s suggested in The Report of the Commission of Public Relations Education (2006), *The Professional Bond*. These courses are: public relations principles, public relations writing, research methods and measurement, provision for internships or professional experience, and campaigns or case studies (or an additional course in ethics, law, management and so forth).**

4. **Cultural distinctions are inherent in many of the education programs. These reflect such factors as government regulations, prevailing media climate, ethics and religious and historical traditions, among others.**
5. **A number of barriers inhibit development of an “ideal” public relations program, including limited financial resources, lack of qualified teachers, country culture, program structure and ineffective or limited relationships with practitioners.**
6. **Graduate programs place greater emphasis on strategic thinking, creativity, advanced theory understanding and research and measurement.**

Thus, it is noted that the field of public relations has reached a global level, crossing social, cultural, and political borders. Public relations practice is now well established around the world after the major growth in the field over the last decade of the Twentieth Century.

According to the [Reed's Worldwide Directory of Public Relations](#) there are now more than 200 public relations professional bodies in 70 nations. They make a membership of more than 150,000 members.

Further, according to the Global Alliance (GA), an international public relations body there is now more than three million people involved in public relations in the world. This surely creates the need for public relations education to be of global standard.



DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION

However, according to the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) public relations despite having been taught as a discipline at many universities since 1923, including those in Belgium, France, The Netherlands, the Federal Republic of Germany, Spain, USA, Latin America, Malaysia, Ghana and Nigeria, it is still developing its full potential. Like the practice itself, public relations education has not been adequately defined. Consequently, it still consists of not just public relations courses alone, but of study in all disciplines through a common communication core.

The IPRM Education Working Committee and the Public Relations Educators Chapter should urgently work at adequately defining public relations education and public relations itself. Otherwise, we should adapt a suitable one, as the one adopted by IPRM need to be up-dated to reflect PR practice today.



Public relations lecturers attending the PR Educators launching after the dialogue on best way to ensure its success and the need to have a Public Relations Profession Act

Nevertheless, the number of colleges and universities offering a major or a course of study in public relations has steadily grown over the years. This is yet another sign that public relations around the world has matured into its own discipline. The same phenomena occur in Malaysia.

In the United States alone, more than 200 universities now have majors or sequences in public relations. In Europe, almost a 100 universities now offer a curriculum in public relations and it is becoming a popular subject among the students. During the past decade, the number of colleges and universities that offer public

relations has also rapidly expanded in the Russian Federation, the Baltic States, Poland, Czech Republic, and Romania. Much of this expansion has been the result of these nations embracing free-market economies and joining—or striving to join—the European Union. The growth of public relations education in the nations of the former Soviet Union has been quite impressive, to say the least.

There has also been rapid growth of public relations education in the universities and technical schools of Asia. At one point, the China International Public Relations Association (CIPRA) estimated that there were 500,000 people studying public relations in the country.

Other Asian nations where public relations education is firmly established and growing in popularity include Thailand, India, Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan. Australian universities in particular have had a strong public relations curriculum for a number of years. In Malaysia, we probably have around 2000 students studying public relations and related fields yearly in about fifteen colleges and universities, both in government and private institutions.



Public Relations Students attending the PR Educators launching

In Africa, the Republic of South Africa is the acknowledged leader in PR education, but programs are also developing nicely in such nations as Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya.

For almost 80 years, public relations education has been developing in universities and colleges in many countries. However, it is only recently there was a coordination attempt. There is now a keen desire to achieve some harmonization of educational standards.

According to IPRA, the curriculum for the education of a student wishing to enter the profession can be pictured as a series of three concentric circles. The smallest central circle encloses the subjects specifically concerned with public relations practice. The second large circle has the subjects in the general field of communication .the third and largest circle represents the general liberal arts and humanities background, which are essential preparation for a successful professional. Most of the Malaysian universities offering PR programmes subscribe to the curriculum.

In addition, according to IPRA, in considering the elements of public relations education it is essential always to respect the individual nature of a country's culture and historical background. The theory of public relations is valid everywhere but its practical application must take into account national character, economy and environment.

We can agree to that. Thus, Malaysian PR Educators and IPRM must work out the public relations curriculum that meets our national requirements as well as the need to enable or empower our graduates to be able to operate or practice globally.

However, a study by Zulhamri Abdullah and Terry Threadgold concluded that the Malaysian public relations industry has grown due to the substantial influences of Western PR knowledge, the public relations profession has not yet matured in terms of achieving professional status in the eyes of society as a whole. This conclusion manifested the arrogance of the researchers and of its colonialistic mentality or that; public relations practitioners outside the Western sphere should be always subservient to them or substandard.

Do they mean that without the substantial influence of the Western public relations knowledge, the Malaysian public relations industry cannot prosper or our public relations education cannot advance?

For any profession to grow or mature the indigenous components must be very strong and influential. It is neither desirable nor necessary that public relations education should be uniform throughout the world. Rather is it essential that PR curricula strongly consider local and national cultures, religions, and indigenous conditions. However, PR Education must also give due considerations to the rapidly globalising environment.

Expectedly, the GA and the PRSA researchers found that U.S. and European educational standards exerted moderate influence on education programs in other parts of the world. They concluded by calling for the development of an electronic compendium of best practices in public relations education – a “global teaching tool kit” – to capture ongoing contributions from worldwide educators: case studies, campaigns, interviews with professionals and other information.

It is believed global PR collaborative research projects are vital because education is a fundamental component of any profession’s systematic resources. This would make public relations education a rich source of professional knowledge and skills for future practitioners. Further, PR education will be a crucial pre-practice field for exploring cultural distinctions and diversity and cultivating a global perspective. After all, formal education can enhance practice quality in any locale even as it builds understanding of the complex interrelationships in the global world.

Scholars and administrators have insisted that one of the major characteristics distinguishing professions from occupations is the intellectual and knowledge base of the former. Today, globally there is evidence that effective public relations practice requires knowledge, skills, and intellect. Although universities often developed these essential elements the breadth and volume of knowledge in public relations is so vast that often-educational programmes in the discipline are not in sharp enough focus.

Public relations are not just skill and creative oriented. It is also intellectual base. Further, the field is broad and difficult to conceptualise. The evolutionary nature of public relations itself precludes historical connections like those of the sciences, arts and letters. Furthermore, public relations’ colorful past had been peopled by many skilled professionals and not a few gift amateurs.

Inherent in the recommendations of the IPRA Gold Papers is the belief that those who intend to study public relations at universities should first obtain a general liberal education. Consequently, the IPRA Education Commission believes that ideally public relations education should be provided mainly degree in other fields, such as commerce, sociology, psychology, and journalism.

This suggestion is not to depreciate the value of programmers, which instruct public relations at undergraduate (first-degree) level and even diploma and certificate levels.

According to the IPRA Education Commission even in the United States, where undergraduate public relations sequences have proliferated in recent years, most of the prominent public relations professors believe their programmes are most effective at the master's degree level. Reaction from the European Confederation of Public Relations (CERP), the Federal Republic of Germany, The Netherlands, and other countries stressed the same view.

By placing the thrust of public relations education beyond the basic bachelor's degree, it is believed would raise the intellectual quality of public relations itself. For it is at this level that most of the major professions would consider the right place to specialise.

While, this is something we should look forward to, in the developing and the newly industrialising nations the professional certificate and the professional diploma public relations programs should be further enhance.

On this note, IPRM together with the PR Educators Chapter will be looking at offering short appreciation and specialization courses to those who are interested in knowing public relations and to those who want to advance their skills and niche. This could be our contribution to the requirements of life-long education as is now made compulsory by the more established profession. As we are fully aware, the profession of public relations is fast increasing in its areas of specializations and demands.

Thus, IPRM feels we should consider the needs of those wanting to follow a short, simple practical course without any academic ambitions. Others may have a purely scientific interest in public relations but do not wish to be trained for practice. Than, there are those who wish to follow a different vocational training or university study, but who regard some knowledge of public relations as necessary for their future success.

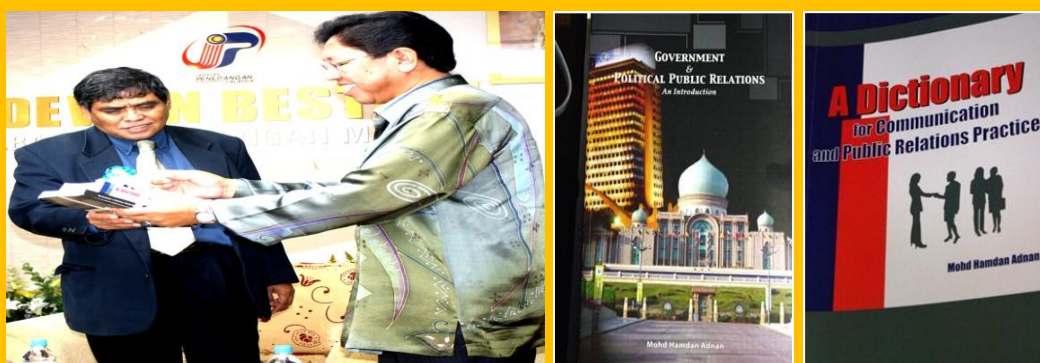
An essential function of public relations educators is to expand the body of knowledge for our profession, not only locally but also globally. Therefore, we have to embark on appropriate research, both pure and applied, that can enhance our professions. Our research can be collobrative in nature, may it at local, national or

international levels. In addition, it can be done not only with fellow educators but also with practitioners. It is hope that the PR Educators Chapter can have numerous workshops to sharpen our research skills as well as searching for new research methodologies and fundings.



IPRM President and Chairperson of the Education Committee, Kiranjit Kaur relaunching the PR Educators Chapter. Looking IPRM Vice President, Hj Ibrahim Abdul Rahman

IPRM hopes that with the relaunching of PR Educators Chapter we make members realise the importance of raising our standards in all aspects of the profession. We are happy that more than a 100 PR educators and students attended this launching. Together with this relaunching IPRM also officially launched two books on public relations. The two books entitle **Government & Political Public Relations And Introduction** and **A Dictionary for Communication and Public Relations Practice**. Both books are written by Professor Dato' Haji Mohd Hamdan Adnan and published by UPENA UiTM in 2010.



Hj Ibrahim Abdul Rahman launching the two public relations books on behalf of his Director-General, Dato' Abdullah Morad of the Information Department.

IPRM would encourage the PR Educators Chapter to investigate the methods of evaluating results of public relations efforts. One of

the critical complain about PR effort is that it is not an exact profession. Results of its efforts are very difficult to measure or to evaluate accurately. PR educators together with practitioners must work closely to develop measurements or evaluations techniques for public relations efforts.

Further, it is hope the PR Educators Chapter members can work together to come up with PR Case Studies. Equally, the Chapter can also have its own journal to ensure members research findings are publish, if not on paper, due to financial constraint, on-line.

Further, it is hope that PR Educators Chapter members can unite to write more books on public relations with local and global flavours. In USA, it is reported that PR educators have written several hundred public relations books annually. The PR Educators Chapter can start by forming a committee for a Malaysian Public Relations Handbook. The last one was published by IPRM in 1986, of which I was one of the two editors. An increase in the quality and quantity of public relations textbooks and papers is encouraged by IPRM by all practical means.

Furthermore, it is hope that the PR Educators Chapter members can work together to look for better and more effective methods of teaching public relations.

In addition, to discuss on PR students' internships in making it more meaningful and rewarding for the interns as well as for those who are kind enough to allow them to do so.

It is also hope that the IPRMEC can help IPRM to act as a clearinghouse with their educational institutions. IPRM prefers that public relations courses be taught as a social science with both academic and professional emphasis. It should be taught by those with a sound experience and understanding of both the academic and professional aspects of the field. IPRM prefer to see one university develop a solid PR programme with six-faculty member than to see six universities offering it with one faculty member each.

IPRM also would like to seek the assistance of the PR Educators Chapter members to ensure a standardised approach to programmes of education and professional advancement for those working in public relations. These opportunities should branch out into related discipline in addition to providing refresher courses in professional subjects. IPRM feels that the education and professional

advancement programmes should be given priority. We would encourage as much variation as possible in the programmes offered. IPRM believes that it is neither possible nor desirable to offer only a single model for the ideal balance between public relations practice and training.

PUBLIC RELATIONS' CHAIR

Actually, the PR Educators are in the best position to get their universities to establish a Public Relations Chair. We are told that it will cost a bomb or more specific it can reach to about RM4 million to do so. Well, if that is the amount to show that, our profession has achieved maturity; I feel it is worth doing it. For sure, journalism has reached that distinction in Malaysia. Some universities in the advance nations have already established chairs in public relations.

We can copy it with some modification to meet our requirements. Are we too poor a cousin to do it? Yet, generally, PR practitioners earn more than journalists do. Furthermore, crossover is more often than not from journalism to public relations. Due to it, journalists tend not to agree with the setting up of the Public Relations Act. With the Act, they cannot simply jump over, and claim themselves as public relations professional without some basic training in public relations. They have to meet the basic requirements even though they have the writing skills, the contact and have their niche in media relations.

Public Relations Profession Act

Here, IPRM would call on PR Educators to support the propose Public Relations Profession Act.



Participants of the Luncheon talk on the essentials of the Public Relations Profession Act.



Prof. Dato' Hamdan, IPRM President explaining the essence of the Act.

The Act aims to review PR practices, PR education and skills training to be competitively benchmarked with professional standards in Malaysia and globally. It hopes to drive professionalism through Accreditation and thereby close the ‘legitimacy gap’ – like other professions in Malaysia. In addition, it hopes to address the fragmentation of the PR industry, which has not generated ‘economies of scale’.

CONTINUING DIALOGUE

Lastly, as said at the beginning, we hope that the PR Educators Chapter members would conduct regular dialogues with all those in public relations. They would include IPRM, PRCA, IPRMSA, in-house public relations professionals, and consultants.

In addition, we should endeavour to have a regular interchange of information and ideas or dialogues between public relations educators in different countries. Today, with the Internet we could just do it on-line and even organise visits. After all, via certain airline, all can fly. We do not think PR educators is that poor? We can start with our neighbouring nations. We can use FAPRO (Federation of Asean Public Relations Organisation) for this end. IPRM initiated FAPRO and now it is back in our hand. Therefore, we must make the best use of it and not let it die a natural death. We feel that the PR Educators Chapter can use FAPRO to good use. Currently, IPRM is cooperating with an institute in Ho Chi Min City to start a professional certificate and diploma program.

The meetings, dialogues, or workshops or seminars should contribute to uniting and strengthening the public relations fraternity. IPRM will help in this endeavour as much as it can. We will create possibilities for Pr educators and practitioners as well as students to meet regularly for the exchange of ideas and discussion of mutual interest.



A very active discussion on the best way forward for the PR Educators Chapter and the need to make the Public Relations Profession Act a reality

The future of public relations education and training and therefore the future of the profession depend on the extent to which a satisfactory dialogue is developed. It should be for the sake of promoting effective, interactive, and ethical public relations professional practice of the world class.

Lastly, we would like to call all PR Educators to work with IPRM and PR practitioners to educate the public, especially our key stakeholders. Let us remind ourselves to be an active member of IPRM and PR Educators Chapter so that we all work under one banner for the advancement of the public relations profession.



IPRMSA UiTM Chapter work very hard to make the launching of the PR Educators Chapter a great success. Together with the students is Doris Lim, IPRM Councilor.

**A TRILLION THANKS FROM
IPRM COUNCILORS AND
THE PRESIDENT,
PROFESSOR DATO' HAJI
MOHD HAMDAN ADNAN.**

Notes:

1. Welcoming remarks during the launching of the Public Relations Educators Chapter (IPRMCE) organised by the UiTMIPRMSA Chapter at the Information Department, 21st October 2010.
2. IPRM'S President and FOMCA'S Advisor, Professor Dato' Haji Mohd Hamdan bin Haji Adnan