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Public relations education, 1950s-1990s: The IPRA perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this article is the exploration of historical themes that formed education and training in public relations and corporate communication. Its timeline is from the 1950s to the mid-1990s when university-level education became widespread. It also acknowledges recent initiatives to propose a Global Capability Framework for the field.

Design/methodology/approach – Archival material, primarily from the International Public Relations Association, was reviewed in order to understand the historic influences that have shaped public relations and corporate communication education in the, mainly, English-speaking world. This was compared with other sources such as journal, articles and other archives in the Germany, Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Findings – Three findings are offered from the archival research and analysis conducted for the article: 1) There was extensive debate over the structure of education between a skills-based approach that was taught as a minor or major stream in an undergraduate degree or graduate level study (Master's) in public relations theory and practice; 2) there was continuing tension between practitioner organisations and academics over the design, content and validation of educational programmes; and 3) there was little interest in the international harmonization of public relations education and training, despite extensive discussion.

Originality/Value – No previous historical research has taken such a broad and international view of the development of education and training in public relations and corporate communication. The article also uses archival material that has become available in the past decade.

Keywords - Public Relations, Curriculum, Education, History, Professionalization, IPRA

Paper type - Research paper

Introduction

The genesis of this article was the announcement a decade ago of the development of a Global Capabilities Framework for public relations by the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (now Global Alliance for Public Relations and Strategic Communication). The Framework was launched in 2018 and supported by the Global Alliance's members which are the national professional bodies for public relations in many countries (Gregory & Fawkes, 2019). It set out three sets of capabilities – Communication, Organizational and Professional – which were to be operationalized by individual practitioners and team leaders. Educators could use the Framework as the basis for curriculum development and review. It is a recent high point in the constant oscillation between international harmonization of public relations education and the needs of national and regional training and education.

As Fitch (2014) and others have found, there is a long-existing tension between practitioners and educators. Practitioners want training for employment while academics seek to blend general learning in research and analysis with higher practitioner skills and problem-solving. This author was once a practitioner advising on the formation of an undergraduate public relations programme at a UK university in the late 1980s. At the time, he was very supportive of a high practice content and of extensive internship experiences for students. Over time, and while moving gradually from practitioner to pracademic to academic, the values of a broad liberal education rose in importance. The outcome of a widely educated, critical thinker with public relations knowledge became the target rather than a competent technician.

These tensions were also evident when reviewing the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) and Public Relations Educators' Forum (PREF) archives at Bournemouth University, the Albert Oeckl archive at Leipzig University and the Joaquin Maestre archive at the University of Navarra, as well as a wide range of early texts and articles on public relations history held in a special collection at Bournemouth University. It is from these sources that much of this article is derived. Sequentially, the article will consider the reasoning and needs that have shaped the debate on public relations education and training, which, it will be argued, have roots in the desire from the middle of the twentieth century, for the field to acquire the tropes and behaviours of a modern profession. For some time, the debate over professionality drew comparisons with established professions including medicine and law, often using dubious analogies. An issue that has persistently beset that public relations and corporate communications fields has been definition(s) of the field and its practices. In the United States, this issue arose again and again. Wright (2011) has applied the term "the disconnect" to the tensions between academics and practitioners. Illustrative examples will be drawn from the PREF archive in the UK and the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA), mostly in the 1990s. As the recent Global Capabilities Framework has shown, there is continuing interest in the harmonization and, to some extent, standardization of public relations education around the word. The IPRA played an important role in this discussion through three of its policy discussions, called Gold Papers, which were issued from the mid-1970s to early 1990s. The later Gold Papers were used as templates for educational programmes in several countries. The article will also consider the role of education in the sequential development of public relations around the world.

The purpose of education

The beginnings of public relations education can be found in the United States, first with short courses and, after 1947, as university degrees. It is not until the 1980s that undergraduate degrees are offered widely with the words "public relations" in the title or as a major in a liberal arts degree outside the United States. The first university course, which was about publicity, was held at the University of Illinois in 1920, while the first course with "public relations" in its title was taught at New York University by Edward Bernays in 1923 and 1924 (Cutlip, 1994, p. 220). The 1920 course was taught by the university's publicity director who demonstrated considerable self-interest as it sought to bring prestige to the new field of publicity and win its acceptance on a campus where faculty were suspicious of its role and value (Cutlip, 1994). Although Bernays taught the NYU course for two years only, he was then and remained an

advocate for moving public relations from publicity and press agentry towards an applied social science approach in which the practitioner was a counsel – a professional adviser to clients and managements. In the 1927 and 1928, Bernays and his wife Doris Fleishman set out their support for a liberal arts-oriented education in two near-identical book chapters:

> [The public relations counsel] must have a broad general culture that will enable him to put his mind quickly to the study of new problems of various types. He must know something of history, the sciences, the arts, politics, finance, psychology. He must have the taste, the judgment, the flexibility, and the broadmindedness that come from this broad culture (Lamme, 2007, p. 88).

Both Bernays and Fleishman also proposed that work experience in newspapers and promotional activity would be combined with this education model as a firm foundation for careers in public relations. Although no specific public relations skills would be taught, the potential entrant to the field would be well educated ("broad general culture") with some hands-on experience. This model would effectively be in abeyance until 1947 when the first degree with "public relations" in its title was launched by Boston University as a Master of Science in Public Relations and taught by the School of Public Relations. As public relations education expanded in the United States, it was delivered as either a four-year liberal arts degree with a major in public relations taught in the final two years or as a two-year graduate programme with a stronger focus on the public relations curricula. In that country's context, the Bernays and Fleishman model was largely adopted and helps describe the purposes of education as preparing entrants to be advisers or counsellors and thus more than technicians able to prepare media-ready materials, engage with media, prepare promotions and run events. Those could be undertaken by people with journalism and publicity experience, largely learnt on-the-job. Education was to advance the field and the standing of practitioners.

Desire for professional status

From the 1930s onwards, public relations, as a practice, had ambitions to be perceived as a profession and be seen alongside what were perceived as the "true professions", especially law and medicine. The ambition was expressed by the social scientist Rex Harlow in 1939.

> Indeed, at the moment it [public relations] promises – possibly it is already undergoing – a rebirth through which, chrysalis like, it may emerge as a new profession dignified by admission, alongside of law, medicine, engineering, education, architecture and other professions, to the campuses of our leading colleges and universities (p. 263).

Professional status appeared repeatedly as an aspiration or description in literature, but with few discussions of the nature of professions and professionalism. By 1961, the academic and

historian Scott Cutlip was writing about the early history of public relations education in the United States and commented that the desire for academic recognition was mostly about practitioners legitimizing “their way of earning a living”. Presciently, he touched on the question as to whether PR “merits” teaching, a topic that still reverberates (Cutlip, 1961).

> From the late 1930s, as now, practitioners eagerly seized up academic recognition of their craft for its prestige value. Even today this writer has the distinct impression that practitioners promote university public relations courses as much for the prestige that it brings their way of earning a living as out of a conviction of the merit of such courses (Cutlip, 1961, p. 367).

In the same journal article, he added:

> (after 40 years) the pattern of education in this field remains fluid, experimental, somewhat fragmentary, and still quite controversial. There continues to be debate by both professional educators and practitioners whether it merits teaching (Cutlip, 1961, p.370).

Harlow, nearly 30 years after his first comments (above) wrote that practitioner’s work had become “more professional in character and execution” but was not ranked with “leading professions” such as law, medicine and education (Harlow, 1968, pp. 7-8). Again, there was no discussion in his paper of what “professional” meant. An impediment to this debate in the US could have laid with the majority of public relations programmes being long housed academically in journalism schools, which have emphasised writing and media production skills over critical and strategic thinking (Wright and Flynn, 2017, p. 56). Although the language of professionalism has been used, the emphasis has been more on occupational training, which has also affected public relations’ claims to be a communication science. In the late 1970s, only ten percent of the 117 US universities and major colleges offering a major in public relations were accredited by the-then American Council on Education for Journalism (ACEJ, now AEJMC) after twenty-two years of its operation. Although the level of accreditation has risen after the Commission on Public Relations Education (CPRE) was started in 1989, there are still many US programs outside its purview. In the period reviewed in this article, CPRE had little influence on the international development of public relations education.

L’Etang (2004) has noted that education is important in the sociological literature on professionalization, which has a trait of intellectual and practical training. Process theorists saw training and education as a crucial second stage after a full-time occupation emerges. Education was also seen as an element in a profession’s competitive positioning and helped define the

boundaries of a profession by offering a route to control entry to it and legitimate the field and its practice. Education thus helped distinguish public relations from other communications fields and give it a nascent professional status, although few other commentators during the period under review were able to express the "professional" concept with such insight.

Defining public relations and public relation work has always been problematic. L'Etang noted that when the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) was founded in the United Kingdom in 1948, managing entry to membership was a challenge as there were no educational qualifications available in the country. IPR's founders decided that some groups such as press agents and publicists were to be excluded but the entry criteria were very woolly. Membership was to be open to those who were experienced in the field "with a high all-round standard of technical ability (and) practical ability" and holding a bona fide public relations position in a staff or advisory role (L'Etang, 2004, p. 188). The IPR developed training programmes in the decade ahead but still clung to its very loose and "who you know" criteria for many decades. Later, it added an entry threshold of five years' experience in public relations work to those who sought full membership.

Professional analogies

The constant use of professional analogies, especially from medicine, to debate the nature and purpose of public relations education took a strange turn in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Edward Bernays used the medical training of surgeons to argue against the emphasis on writing skills in university courses, while John Merrill of the University of Maryland argued against the comparison:

> Medical college students who want to become surgeons are not taught how to wield scalpels and knives before they are taught the basics about the human body, the blood stream, the skeletal structure, the nervous system and much else. To put emphasis on writing skills in public relations is comparable (Bernays, 1978, p. 18).

In response, Merrill retorted that Bernays' analogy was poor and that the public relations pioneer have known that should know that the writing skills and word-sophistication of students engaged in communication programmes were "not comparable to a medical student's wielding scalpels" (Merrill, 1979, p. 29). Both agreed that public relations was an applied social science but continued to disagree about then-current courses focus on writing and personal communication skills. This debate continued soon after, when leading US practitioner J.

Carroll Bateman used medical school education for his analogy that practitioners (or professionals in his language) needed to be part of PR education.

> One cannot conceive student doctors in schools of medicine being taught entirely by theoreticians – they must also have some of their instruction from practicing physicians and surgeons, professionals who have faced day-to-day problems of practice. The analogy applies also to education in public relations … (Bateman, 1978, p. 9).

Wright, a prominent public relations educator, also commented that before public relations became a "true profession – such as medicine or law", the field's education had to progress to the same standards (Wright, 1984, p. 7). On a similar tack, an agency CEO Roy Leffingwell made a case in the *IPRA Review* that public relations counsellors were of a higher standing than public relations technicians and should not work under the same roof or business. Counsellors were "surgeons" (supreme professionals), and technicians were "nursing aides" (that is, skilled workers). Mixing technicians and counsellors in a PR firm was "comparable to the medical profession putting surgeons and nursing aids (sic) into the same professional organisation" (Leffingwell, 1981, p.37).

This was, however, a sterile argument largely conducted by wordsmiths which failed to extemporize or define what the professional standards and status were. Twenty years after Cutlip's 1961 critique of the desire for public relations to have professional status, there was little progress on education and training. Sharp, a leading public relations educator, commented over twenty years later that the quality of graduates in public relations was criticised as weak by industry professionals (Sharp, 1982, p. 39). At about the same time, Newsom, another committed public relations educator in the US, posed the question as to whether public relations was an occupation or "some would say a profession" (Newsom, 1984, p. 30). This is a conundrum – training for an occupation versus education for a profession - that rumbles on. Fifty years after Cutlip, Wright (2011) pointed to a similar deficit in support for PR education and lack of understanding from practitioners. Wright and VanSlyke Turk (2003) reported a lack of consensus about how, or even whether, public relations should be taught at US universities. They also pointed out that "some of the greatest discrepancies facing public relations education continue to be lack of support, encouragement and understanding from those who practice the profession" (p. 237). The tension between academics and practitioners will be explored later.

The definition problem

As L'Etang (2004) commented above, a persistent problem facing the early discussion of public relations education was the definition of public relations itself. Krimel (1947) identified the definition of public relations as a problem when preparing courses:

> Although many universities now offer courses in public relations, there is little agreement on what such courses should include. Instructors are consequently faced with problems of defining the field of public relations, deciding what types of activity they should train students, and determining what subject matter should be emphasized … For example, should public relations be taught as a set of skills, a body of knowledge, a pattern for thinking, or as an approach or attitude towards individual problems (Krimel, 1949, p. 540).

At that time, Krimel asked a group of practitioners for their definitions and got answers such as "getting on with folks", "public relations is human relations" and "getting on with folks on behalf of an institution". It was not until a semanticist colleague proposed "public relations is whatever a public relations man does" that there was some agreement. Of course, this is more than seventy years ago and most university courses link to the definitions used by their national practitioner body as a reference point but there remains a problem that definitions have been rather nebulous and all-purpose. Some thirty-five years later, Newsom also pointed to the definition questions: "It is not surprising that a discipline that cannot even agree on its definition is confused about career preparation" (1984, p. 7). Despite this problem, discussion of public relations education continued with a form of definitional avoidance or blindness accepted by many participants.

World-wide standard

There has long been a desire, mainly from practitioners, for a world-wide standardization or harmonization of PR education. It was an early aim of IPRA but a report by a leading member Etienne Bloch of France in 1963 commented that one of the "biggest difficulties" for PR education was the creation of "a definite and standardized programme" for all countries (Bloch, 1963). Operating from Europe, but with input from North American practitioners and academics, IPRA played a lead role in promoting a world-wide approach to education. Ten years later, IPRA identified "great disparities" between countries, including definitions and concepts as a barrier (IPRA, 1976, p. 2). The emphasis would gradually move from a widely adopted international model for university education to a more negotiable concept of an "ideal" PR education programme which could be adapted to local circumstances. But again and again, there were reports and commissions promoting what they considered to be the best model for

most purposes. As IPRA took a leading role, through its Gold Papers on education, its approach will be considered fully.

IPRA Gold Paper No. 2 (1976)

IPRA had previously surveyed membership and made proposals in Europe in 1960 and 1963. In 1973, an IPRA sub-committee on education had reported to the organization's Sixth PR World Congress in Geneva that there was "an excessive variety of titles" for educational and training programmes but little in the way of common curricula (IPRA, 1976.). For example, public relations content was taught under titles such as "communications", "journalism", "advertising" and "marketing", but not as "public relations".

Albert Oeckl, the German PR pioneer, led a panel that wrote IPRA Gold Paper No.2, *General Report on Public Relations Education World-Wide* (IPRA, 1976). It was a survey of education and training that was on offer in a small number of universities and industry bodies in western Europe. Oeckl, who treated the Gold Paper as his intellectual property, showed his hand early by lamenting that no educational handbook had been produced to "standardize activities". His core argument was that there needed be common standards and curricula across the public relations world but did not offer his reasoning or evidence for this assertion.

The Gold Paper identified three models that could be templates for undergraduate, intermediate level (people entering PR employment), and short course education and training. They were a two-year undergraduate degree, developed by the University of Paris-Sorbonne; a ten-week intermediate-level course, introduced by the Swiss PR Society of Switzerland; and, practical short courses lasting from three days to two weeks, delivered by the German Institute of Public Relations (DIPR).

In the example from the University of Paris – Sorbonne's CELSA – Institut des Hautes Etudes, "public relations" as a subject or module title was only included one of eleven modules in the first year and one on ten modules on the second year. Generalist topics included economics, political structures, psychology and foreign languages in both years. This was thus, very much in the Bernays/Fleishman mould, of a general liberal arts or humanities degree. The intermediate and fundamental level courses (to use Oeckl's categories) were much more focused on communications and public relations as practices (internal and external), methods of communication, ethics and practice.

Oeckl called for international cooperation instead of "the independent, go-it-alone trends which now prevail" in order to assist "development of the PR profession" (IPRA, 1976, p. 15). There is no evidence in the IPRA archive that these recommendations were followed up at undergraduate level, although PR associations increased their offerings of local certificates and diplomas, and short course training. Other recommendations included an International Clearing and Documentation Centre for Public Relations Education at all levels, a regular report on PR research, the formation of accreditation and licensing structures for educational and training courses "in the interest of higher regard and acceptance of public relations as a profession" (IPRA, 1976, p. 16). This was already taking place in the United States. Another proposal was for an international conference on university education (p. 17) which was attempted by IPRA but had little attendance by academics.

Oeckl, in his highly personal writing style, emphasized with capital letters and underlining the lack of qualified teachers – academics either had "little or no experience of public relations" or "lacked higher degrees" (IPRA, 1976, p. 3). The former was also a persistent criticism by practitioners of US degree programmes.

IPRA Gold Paper No. 4 (1982)

The next IPRA Gold Paper on education (no. 4) was published in 1982 six years after Gold Paper No. 2. Titled as *A Model for Public Relations Education for Professional Practice*, it was a major step away from the liberal arts model towards a distinctive public relations degree programme (IPRA, 1982). Led by the Swedish practitioner Göran Sjöberg, the Paper favoured public relations being taught as a graduate (master's) degree. It also proposed a much more detailed curriculum than before.

It encapsulated the curriculum as a "Wheel of Education" (IPRA, 1982, p. 2) on the theory and practice of public relations. The innermost or core section was "Theory and Practice of Public Relations", the next or middle circle was associated promotional and communication activities (including advertising, media law and ethics, editing, writing for mass media) with the third and outer circle included business management, economics, social sciences, politics and government. The content of the core of the Wheel of Education had four elements: Theory (or principles) of public relations, public relation case problems, public relations administration and management and public relations internship or practice. The theory element would include

theories and principles of public relations practice, an introduction to scholarly literature of the field, discussion of the processes of public opinion, and the planning, management and evaluation of public relations programmes. It is notable that skills such as writing, event management, and media relations are not included in the core but are placed in the middle circle of communications studies.

Among its recommendations were “ideally” a preference for public relations full-time education to be offered as a second degree, although it recognized that most education was then offered as a first degree (undergraduate) level. The reasoning behind the preference for graduate education was the desire for recognition of public relations as a professional field: “This (graduate level programmes) would place education for public relations at the same level as many of the more traditional professions – for example, medicine and law” (IPRA, 1982, p. 13). As in other instances, the benefits of this comparison are not explored or explained.

It called for public relations to be taught as a social science by lecturers with both academic and professional experience in the field. As this was an immediate limitation because of the scarcity of potential lecturers, the Paper counselled against rapid expansion – “we would prefer to see one university develop a solid programme with five faculty than to see five universities house programmes with one faculty member each” (IPRA, 1982, p. 30).

As with the previous Gold Paper, there was a strong recommendation for a “standardised approach to programmes of education and professional advancement for those working in public relations” (IPRA, 1982, p. 30), but not for academic programmes. These practitioner education programmes were to be developed with IPRA and the national and regional professional associations. One recommendation in the Paper which was to be widely adopted was the inclusion of an internship during degrees. It was referred to as a Probationary Period but was lauded as a “very effective method of bringing students into contact with the profession” although it acknowledged that there may not be sufficient, well-organized opportunities for students at that time (IPRA, 1982, p. 30).

Gold Paper No.4 moved on from focussing only on curricula and discussed how the base of discussion could be widened. It sought the linking of theory and practice in teaching, the broadening of the intellectual base of the field, and made recommendations on the quality of teaching and resources for university courses. Ironically, there was considerable discussion

about the need for dialogue between academics and practitioners but little evidence that the academy had been consulted about the Paper's content and recommendations.

IPRA Gold Paper No. 7, 1990

Eight years later, the third IPRA Gold Paper, No. 7 - *Public Relations Education – Recommendations and Standards*, was published as a response to the proposals in the previous Gold Paper, to report on progress and further develop IPRA's policy on education (IPRA, 1990). It noted that Gold Paper No. 4 had been "used by members in many countries to support approaches to higher education institutions to introduce public relations educational programmes", and that "many new courses, such as the full-time MSc degree programme at the University of Stirling in Scotland", had been developed using its recommendations (IPRA, 1990, p. 3). In addition to the Stirling graduate degree, the influence of the previous Gold Paper No. 4 was also recorded in that it had "helped facilitate the introduction of BA (Honours) in Public Relations degrees at three English universities" (IPRA, 1990, p. 3). Two of those universities, Bournemouth and Leeds Beckett, still offer degrees with substantial public relations content some 35 years after they were introduced.

Gold Paper No. 7 largely endorsed its predecessor. It varied Paper No. 4's prime recommendation for public relations to be taught at graduate level to a broader spread of degree types from undergraduate to doctoral levels. It blandly stated that that these degrees "will equip successful students to fill positions in the professions at different levels" (IPRA, 1990, p. 27). Other similar recommendations were emphases on teaching staff to have both academic and relevant professional experience and that academic departments should be engaged with national and international professional associations, especially in the provision of short courses. There were, however, differences such as a movement away from standardized curricula at academic and professional levels – "it is neither desirable nor necessary for public relations education to be uniform throughout the world. Rather it is essential that curricula should take into account local and national cultures, religions and indigenous conditions" (IPRA, 1990, p. 27).

The Paper's main value may have been that it offered educators and professional bodies a contemporary listing of degree and diploma programmes which could be used as templates or comparisons when developing or reviewing programmes. These came from Canada, Denmark, Finland, India, Netherlands New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States and the regional MA

in European Public Relations which was offered in five countries (Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom). This range of degrees gave considerable heft to claims that public relations education was moving forward.

There was also sobering discussion about the problems of recognizing and accrediting these programmes. Indeed, it was the first time in this series of papers that these issues had been addressed (IPRA, 1990, p. 25). They included problems of defining public relations and of having a "body of knowledge" which was recognised widely. There was "no all-embracing theory to tie the field together" (IPRA, 1990, p. 25). Despite these issues, the Paper called for "a common body of knowledge in public relations" to be an outcome of accreditation of courses, implying that the creation of criteria for this process would work backwards to define the body of knowledge. The issue of content was thus left hanging in the air although it was proposed that programmes include "instruction in management science and analytical methods; human relations; motivation and attitudes studies and communication; and the external environment in which different organisations operate" (IPRA, 1990, p. 25). It is notable, and very odd, that this list does not include public relations theory and practice.

Both Gold Papers No. 4 and No. 7 addressed the issue of the relationship between academics/teachers and practitioners. In the eight years between the two papers, there had been considerable expansion in the range of courses being launched around the world. In the 1990 document, there was evidence that the relationship between practitioners, who may have presumed they were driving the need for education, and academics (also referred to as teachers) was not always a happy one. It was reported (IPRA, 1990, p. 17) that "some trainers, those on the academic level, have created an elitist distance between themselves and the profession." This stance was considered to be "objectionable" and had to be rejected. Within this section was the essence of the conflict, as the authors considered the academic faculty to be "trainers" and mere deliverers of curricula. They also stated that the profession sought to define the subjects for tuition and "to control the training". There was an arrogance in these attitudes that most likely was the cause of the conflict. All three Gold Papers contained criticism of the quality of teaching yet did not accept that academic education was not just training and the preparation of students to be "oven ready" for entry into public relations employment.

Gold Paper No.7 which was more focused on public relations education in the United States became the template for PR education in Eastern Europe and the developing world. Both were

important reports, along with those from the US. Universities appear to have used them as benchmarks when developing their programmes. By comparison, efforts in the United States in the mid-1970s such as the *Design for Public Relations Education booklet*, to shape the nation's public relations curricula at a time when degree programmes were burgeoning were mostly "put on the shelf to gather dust" (McCartney, 1984, p. 7). The sustained effort by IPRA appears to have had much more impact over a 15-year period from 1976 to 1990.

The "disconnect"

Wright (2011) brands the persistent differences between academics and practitioners over the purpose of PR education; and the lack of investment by practitioners in PR education and training as "the disconnect" (p. 246). This misalignment of interests has been long evident and can be found in the overbearing attitudes of some practitioners which were identified in IPRA Gold Paper No. 7. Wright notes from his long experience that when educators talk to practitioners about curricula, it is often the same, small group of engaged practitioners who may not be representative of the attitudes of the vast rump of their colleagues. In the UK, L'Etang found that respectability, in terms of recognition of public relations as a professional activity, was as hard for academics as it was for practitioners, "but for academics it was war on two fronts" as they had to win respect from practitioners and from fellow academics in established disciplines (2004, p. 216-7). There were continuing tensions also over curriculum content.

The PREF archive includes an example from the mid-1990s when there was heated clash between the UK's professional and industry bodies (IPR and the Public Relations Consultants Association) and PREF over changes to recognition and approval processes for degree programmes which were made without reference to the universities or PREF (PREF, 1996-97). The IPR's Training and Education Committee had issued a statement which noted "the lack of value attached to higher education's contribution to public relations". The chair of the Public Relations Education Trust had also criticised the quality of academic courses and their staff in a letter to the IPR's director. These critiques, which had not been made to PREF itself, were seen as an attempt by the profession to regain control over the teaching and curriculum of public relations programmes. One aspect of this push was that an IPR full member (i.e., accredited by the IPR in terms of experience and standing) had to be employed on each degree programme. As many academics were not members of the IPR, even though many had been practitioners, this was seen as an attempt to take external control over the staffing of degree

programmes (PREF archive, 1996-7). It was several years before relations improved but was another example of the "disconnect" that has long hindered the development of public relations education in many countries. Fitch (2014) found there was constant tension over course content and validation between universities and the Public Relations Institute of Australia, even though academic undergraduate courses had been offered there since 1970. The "disconnect" appears to be a constant issue during the period of this article and subsequently.

Discussion and conclusion

Despite all the problems and uncertainties, there was a "tidal surge" of students from the 1970s onwards in the United States (Wright, 2011) with hundreds of courses on offer. The United Kingdom did not follow until the late 1980s with European provision growing in the 1990s. Australia, Canada and New Zealand had academic courses from the 1970s onwards. Most European countries had association-led training but few academic courses, let alone degrees, until the 1980s and 1990s. Watson (2015) has found that education was one of the "springboards" that powered the world-wide growth of public relations as a service industry and an occupation (p. 12). It largely arose from the efforts of professional associations to legitimize the field of public relations and to give it a veneer of professionalism, albeit with little definition of what the term "professional" meant.

The history of public relations education, as told primarily through the prism of IPRA's efforts, tells us that it was in flux for six decades with a variety of models and that the definition(s) of public relations was (and may still be) a problem. Attempts at standardized world-wide PR education proposed widely in the mid twentieth century have failed but, in the forms of the IPRA Gold Papers Nos. 4 and 7, offered a benchmark for local and national approaches. Time will tell whether the Global Alliance's Capabilities Framework will succeed or, like the *Design for Public Relations Education* of 1975, "gather dust" (McCartney, 1984, p. 7). Tension, however, continues between practitioners and educators and is largely about who controls curriculum rather than creativity or innovation A final thought is, despite tensions and constant debate over the form and quality of public relations education, there has been a great expansion of the field and degree programmes since the 1970s around the world, although this may have peaked. Something must have worked well!

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