

Over the last four years I have accepted, volunteered, or been assigned to contribute as an intern for more than 240 hours across five organizations in four industries: legal, nonprofit, retail, and business-to-business sales and marketing. I have been able to gain an exceptional amount of experience while working with each one, but the most interesting pattern I came across was that each of these organizations had their own preconceived notion on the definition (or application) of public relations. Some of these differences were simply minor details in strategy; others were based on completely different viewpoints altogether. With different industries came different points of emphasis, which inevitably led to different responsibilities at each. No matter the difference between each organization's views, I was always able to see my employer's objectives using the foundation provided by the Gonzaga University Public Relations program. It has become apparent that the ability to adapt and apply public relations knowledge to any given position is equally as important as learning the trade itself. The unique foundation of Jesuit/Ignatian values and the professional preparation provided by Gonzaga University's Public Relations program has guided my journey for the past four years.

Gonzaga University's Public Relations Program

This 39 unit course program is part of the school's Integrated Media Department and combines "study of communication theory, research techniques, and corporate strategies and structures with journalistic expertise." (Gonzaga, 2014). Focus is given to acquisition of the tools and techniques needed to manage communication of all forms between organizations and the people they serve. Hands-on experience in planning campaigns, corporate communication, and

nonprofit organization advocacy is acquired through internships and the creation of a comprehensive public relations plan with media kit for a local organization. Very importantly, the program reflects the Catholic, Jesuit character and liberal arts tradition of Gonzaga. (Gonzaga, 2014).

General Perception of Public Relations

Why is it so important that the Public Relations Program be grounded in Ignatian values? The 2014 Edelman Trust Barometer found rather shocking declines, showing trust of government down to 37 percent and trust by the public in business in general down to 58 percent. ING's 2014 Social Media Impact Survey showed that half of the journalists surveyed found consumer opinion more reliable than any kind of official statements from organizations. That means that those in charge of public relations are generally not considered trustworthy. (Johnson, 2014).

A 2011 article entitled "PR people are supposed to lie" recounts the experience of an instructor of a PR writing class with his students and a posting on LinkedIn's PRSA National discussion board. A variety of reasons were shared for the generally low opinion of public relations professionals, but clearly a lack of ethical training is part of the problem. It was noted that younger professionals just "don't have the training or the background to make good, ethical decisions. They just don't know any better." (Bernardino, 2011).

Similarly, a study from the Ethics Resource Center examined trends among the four generation groups of Traditionalists, Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials. Younger workers were found to be more at risk as measured by four ethical performance standards: misconduct, pressure to compromise standards, reporting, and retaliation. Pressure to please supervisors and

simple ignorance of the codes of ethics of public relations professionals can be looked at for possible reasons for these lapses. Education, both as part of a preparatory course of study and ongoing, is seen as key to changing these distressing perceptions. (Silverman, 2013).

A June 30, 2013 article in *Forbes* magazine sums up what public relations could stand for instead. The piece by Sharam Fouladgar-Mercer was entitled, "The 3 Ts of a Great PR Experience: Truth, Trust, and Transparency." Specific advice is absolute adherence by both the client and the public relations practitioner to telling the truth about capabilities, limitations, and passions. Trust involves not only a track record of trustworthy behavior and success, but equally important is the ability to tell the client how success will actually be measured. Transparency means getting past the perception of public relations as a "black box" and allowing both parties – client and public relations professional – to put every misconception, fear, and great idea out in the open during the process of working together. (Fouladgar-Mercer, 2013). Another article, "Understanding organizational ethics: How PR professionals can steer a safe course" suggests that public relations professionals perform a "looking glass" exercise that assesses their organization's actions from the two moral perspectives of utilitarianism and communitarianism and then compares and contrasts the results. Several strategies are suggested to help the professional who finds himself or herself working with a less than completely ethical organization. Arming oneself with knowledge is the foundation. Then come preparing proactively for a variety of crisis situations and trusting one's own instincts. Finally, it becomes time to either begin a corporate campaign for ethics or sever the relationship. (Jacobson, 2009).

Values Foundation

My Gonzaga education which is grounded in Catholic, Jesuit values as exemplified by St. Ignatius of Loyola prepared me for my experiences over these last few years and for my professional practice to come. Gonzaga's Mission Statement is a succinct explanation of the rationale for Gonzaga's existence; its purpose is to educate students for "lives of leadership and service for the common good" by modeling and expecting intellectual, spiritual, physical and emotional excellence. Through its educational methodology, Gonzaga cultivates both the capacity for and the disposition to achieve "reflective and critical thought, lifelong learning, spiritual growth, ethical discernment, creativity, and innovation." (Gonzaga, 2013).

In 2012, 125-year-old Gonzaga established a Statement of Affirmation which testifies to Gonzaga's identity as specifically a Jesuit, Catholic, and humanistic university. This means that the values, ethical concepts, and educational precepts taught by the university go beyond the secular or the vaguely religious. They adhere to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the principles and ideals of Catholic Social Teaching. The Catholic Intellectual Tradition brings the following foundational principles to higher education: the complementarity of faith and reason; the importance of intellectual community and dialogue; an Incarnational and Sacramental vision; a commitment to whole person education; emphasis on liberal education; and concern for prophetic witness and service.

My Personal Experience as Intern and Volunteer

Reflecting upon my journey through five positions in four industries highlights how my value-based education has uniquely prepared me for professional success. As mentioned earlier, the academic course of instruction was based on communication theory, techniques for effective

research, an understanding of corporate strategies and structures combined with acquisition of journalistic expertise. Preparation for real-world interactions came from these courses embedded in the overall values of Gonzaga. I am now confident in my ability to adapt and apply public relations knowledge to any given position.

Osborn-Machler Law Firm - Office Intern

Before attending college, law was the only career path I had even considered following. On its surface, I saw a career driven by investigative pursuits of justice, and all of the attractive benefits alongside. I formed close relationships with individuals who practiced law within my community as a young adult and still hold them in the upmost amount of respect to this day. However, my experience in a law firm as intern was my first real glimpse of the job market behind its glittering curtain.

Throughout the summer my mentor and attorney, Sim Osborn, was in the midst of a monumental civil case with King County. My initial role providing assistance to the office staff with day-to-day operations proved to be more "character building" than anything else. But once the endless amounts of data and paperwork settled I started to see a different yet very important aspect of the firm. As the civil case began to pick up speed, so did the media attention it received. The reputation of our firm and client in the public spectrum played a significant role in the preceding steps and final result of the case.

While I might not have been in the media room representing the firm, I was able to feel and witness the momentum of public relations in the case. Reflecting back, I can see the true significance and importance of media relations and communication in the environment.

Imagine Behavioral & Developmental Services -Training & Consulting Intern

Imagine was formed in the early part of 2011 and provides services in Washington and Idaho through programs for children with autism or other developmental disabilities and community-based programs for both children and adults with or without disabilities who are struggling with difficult or problem behaviors. This internship (provided through COMM 375) was a very successful experience in which I learned to identify an organization's unique needs and offer solutions in an equally unique fashion. After our initial meeting, I quickly realized that our client had absolutely no idea where to begin with social media or community outreach. This was not such a daunting task because of all the knowledge I had already been provided through the integration of digital media and community outreach concepts in my public relations studies. I did not, however, expect to learn such invaluable lessons in the realm of public communication through this experience, specifically the importance of and careful craft of coaching and guidance within an organization.

Camp Fire Inland Northwest - Public Relations Campaign Intern

This chapter of the non-profit Camp Fire organization was formed in 1914 and since then has focused on serving young people ages 3-18 on a "journey to self-discovery" that encourages them to become advocates and leaders in their own communities. This internship (obtained through PRLS 467) centered on the annual candy fundraiser and the need to encourage sales through rebranding and promotion. Four main tactics supported the campaign goals: a recipe contest with local restaurants showcasing the product in baked goods; an increase in social media presence; sponsorship from local businesses; and partnership with other local non-profit organizations such as the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Club. I was specifically involved in

creation of a schedule for and guide to using social media. This is another example of the value of the community outreach concepts I had learned through my studies.

BumbleBar Inc. - Public Relations & Marketing Intern

BumbleBar was founded in 1995 and has grown tremendously since then, expanding its original line of nut based energy bars to 17 certified organic, gluten-free, and delicious bars in the BumbleBar and sister JunoBar lines. The foundation of the business which is dedicated to the concepts of healthy food and sustainability is the "triple bottom line" of People, Profit, and Planet. I enjoyed my work with Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, Google +, Amazon monitoring, and Google Analytics and AdWords. Researching gained in ease as I became more comfortable with Buffer and Hoot Suite. One of my recommendations was the use of Tumblr to showcase the company's efforts in support of the planet by establishing a "going green in the office" niche.

Mentoring Works Washington - Social Media Campaign Volunteer

This ten-year old public-private partnership serves as the umbrella organization for Washington State's mentoring community. It supports training and technical assistance, data collection and tracking, public awareness and public policy. Through 180 community-based mentoring organizations, the organization serves 34,000 children and youths in kindergarten through high school. I served as a volunteer for their social media campaign. Perhaps most impressive about the organization is their commitment to sharing best practices throughout the community. They report that less than 40% of the state's mentoring organizations report using the best practices for mentoring known as Elements of Effective Practice. My work was rather

minimal as their social media consultant. I created all their social media accounts and helped assigned specific roles/tasks to employees. However, I was happy to be part of their response to many ongoing challenges by assisting in increasing public awareness.

Combining Values-Based Education and Professional Practices

Further attention to the Gonzaga Mission Statement shows clearly why I consider it such exemplary preparation for my career:

The Gonzaga experience fosters a mature commitment to dignity of the human person, social justice, diversity, intercultural competence, global engagement, solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, and care for the planet. Grateful to God, the Gonzaga community carries out this mission with responsible stewardship of our physical, financial, and human resources. (Gonzaga, 2013).

Looking at the Public Relations Society of America Member Code of Ethics and accompanying Statement of Professional Values, it is easy to see the overlap. Core values are advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty, and fairness. Core principles are the free flow of information, competition, disclosure, safeguarding confidences, avoiding conflicts of interest, and enhancing the profession. (PRSA, n.d.).

Specifically, professional practices can be compared to the ideals of Catholic Social Teaching which declares that every human person has inherent dignity and that, together with that concept, each human has both a right and the responsibility to contribute to the common good. Humans are additionally stewards of all of God's creation and therefore are responsible for preserving the earth. Very importantly, all people are to be assured of their right to participate economically, politically, and culturally in their communities and greater society.

Beyond these Catholic ideals are the larger humanistic values which Gonzaga stands for and of which I have been the benefactor. My knowledge has been developed through the entire liberal curriculum and my professional expertise has been carefully promoted. The intellectual and practical skills which have been put to beginning use in my internships and which will be the mainstay of my public relations career include reasoning, evaluating, communicating, quantifying, problem solving, specializing, integrating, and imagining.

Ignatian spirituality is intensely practical. It is put into action by lay people living active lives in the greater world because God is part of all the everyday activities of ordinary life. It is directed toward reflection and self-scrutiny. But reflection does not have the best reputation in many businesses, where reflection is considered almost indistinguishable from decision-making and is mostly considered a tool of the elites of an organization. Even they are more action-oriented, often at the cost of appropriate and necessary reflection. However, the *Spiritual Exercises* focus on ends while engaging both the emotions and the imagination. They use role modeling, and require a thoughtful response. (Moberg and Calkins, 2001). An appreciation of the use of the *Spiritual Exercises* is another benefit of the education I have received and how it has prepared me for real-world situations.

I am particularly pleased that I have been able to work in both the profit and not-for-profit industries during my internships and volunteer work. I have been blessed to work with an ethical mentor at a law firm who is worthy of a great deal of respect. I have worked for a company that makes sustainability and commitment to both the individual and the community a critical part of their path to profit. I have worked for organizations which exist for no reason other than community improvement and enrichment. Ethical reasoning and action, engagement, reflection, and a commitment to a just society are specifically the base of my learning which I

intend to take into the practice of public relations. These correlate to the Code of Ethics of the public relations profession values of: advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty, and fairness. Unlike those who report the unsettling claims that ethics are not taught or understood adequately in the profession, I have just such teachings behind me. I have not been taught what to think, but rather I have been given the opportunity to learn how to think and how to follow that with committed action. I have been encouraged to continue with the practice of reflection so that my professional and spiritual lives, always intended to be inter-connected, can both thrive. The Jesuit tradition expressed in Latin as *cura personalis* translates as the *care and concern for the dignity of the whole person*, and there is no greater ethical foundation for a profession like public relations which has the capacity to communicate for good or ill.

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