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A Career Profile in Public Information

Elizabeth C. Forney

Eastern Illinois University

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A Career Profile in Public Information

(TITLE)

BY

Elizabeth C. Forney

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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ABSTRACT

This study examines public information as a profession by surveying professionals at the management level in state government. Respondents provided data which was analyzed using content analysis, paired correlation, univariate statistics, and phenomenology. Results reveal a general theme involving journalism. Respondents indicated a background (educational and occupational) in journalism is the most important aspect in a public information career. This study provides average ages, dominant gender, salary figures, specific educational preparation advice, and advice for getting into and achieving in the public information field.

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My thesis committee, Dr. Frank Parcells (chair), Dr. Douglas Bock, and Dr. Floyd Merritt, provided endless advice and guidance. This thesis is dedicated to those who helped push me to complete my Master's degree and guided me along the way.

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Chapter I

In the United States, the integration of public relations into local, state, and federal government programs has occurred largely since World War II. Before this time, public relations was practiced mainly in the upper levels of the federal government (Aronoff & Baskin, 1983, p. 304).

In 1913 Congress passed an amendment that is often interpreted to prohibit the use of public relations talent by government. The amendment was added to an Interstate Commerce Commission statute. It became known as the Gillett Amendment (38, U.S.C. 3017): "No money appropriated by any act shall be used for the compensation of any publicity expert unless specifically appropriated for the purpose" (Aronoff & Baskin, 1983, p. 304).

Frederick H. Gillett, intended to identify and control publicity when he proposed the amendment. He and other legislators were concerned that the government would become involved in propaganda directed at U.S. citizens (Beatty, 1972, p. 13).

The Gillett Amendment does not completely exclude public relations in government. Despite limitations placed on public relations activity by Congress, there is a need for government publicity. The main reason is to inform citizens of the services available and how they can be used (Aronoff & Baskin, 1983,p. 303).

Non-profit organizations like government agencies, trade associations, colleges and universities, and volunteer agencies usually employ a public information department rather than a public relations department to disseminate information (Lovell, 1982, p. 8). Lovell (1982), claims public information is "public relations without a distinct product other than the work or service of the organization involved" (p. 8).

While public information is essentially public relations, the major difference is the manner in which the information is presented. Gwil Evans, chairman of communications of the Ohio State University Extension Service, indicates that public relations is doing something good and getting credit for it while public information gives less credit to an organization and is more oriented to providing useful information (Lovell, 1982, p. 88).

Government public relations practitioners are usually known as public information officers (PIO). Aronoff and Baskin (1983), report that public opinion provides the climate in which public agencies and institutions succeed or fail, public information officers attempt to understand and affect public opinion (p. 303). In government public relations is a marketing function that helps to define objectives and philosophies while facilitating the organization's ability to adapt to the demands of the public

(Aronoff & Baskin, 1983, pp. 303 & 304).

Why Study Public Relations?

Pavlik (1987) reports that scholars studying public relations are motivated by many things. In the academic world, some are concerned with understanding public relations as a form of communication, while others are interested in advancing the profession. Pavlik (1987) reveals that the strongest motivation for studying public relations is to serve the profession, "to conduct research that will advance the profession and train the next generation of practitioners" (p. 25).

Public relations has been studied using various research methods. This study falls into Pavlik's broad class of public relations research (1987, p. 81), introspective. This type of research looks inward at the field and includes: a) sociological research, b) descriptive research, c) research into professionalism, social responsibility and licensing, and d) educational research (p. 81). I intend to implement a form of descriptive research which Pavlik (1987) describes as "looking at public relations as a field of employment- what are the salaries, job titles, and so on" (p. 81).

Justification

Because of the slight differences between public relations and public information, difficulties arise in attaching a concrete definition to the public information branch. After completing a variety of searches for literature or research pertaining to public information at the state government level as a specific career, I have come to the conclusion that this study is justified as it will contribute new and useful information to the field of speech communication.

Searches completed include: a) ERIC search service, b) CD-ROM, c) Academic Index and Dissertation Abstracts 1966-1989, d) MLA Bibliography, e) ABI-Inform, and F) Online Search. All searches were done based on the terms public information, public relations, public affairs, and/or government.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to profile a career in public information at a management level in state government.

Chapter II

Methodology

The Illinois State Government employs approximately 260 full-time and part-time public information officers, or press spokesmen (<u>State Journal Register</u>, March 4, 1990, p. 25).

For the purpose of this study, 53 department/section heads were chosen from the <u>Directory of Public Information Personnel</u> compiled by the Bureau of Illinois Information Services (Department of Central Management Services, October 1989).

A survey-questionnaire was used as a measuring device and was mailed to respondents at their place of work. See Appendix A. Accompanying the survey was a postage-paid, addressed envelope in which to return the materials. The respondents were given approximately 10 days to return the survey-questionnaire. Of the 53 surveyed, 38 responded for a 72 percent return rate.

The survey-questionnaire was developed after interviews with four randomly selected public information department/section heads also chosen from the <u>Directory of Public Information Personnnel</u>. The interviews were conducted March 16 and 19, 1990. The initial survey was implemented in a pilot study using five randomly selected PIOs, also chosen from the directory. See Appendix B.

Surveys were sent out April 1, 1990 and all five were returned by April 14, 1990. The final survey-questionnaire was sent out April 23, 1990 and returns were accepted until June 11, 1990.

The pilot survey-questionnaire sought improvements or suggestions from those subjects in the public information field. One suggestion was made to change the survey. Respondents implied that entry-skills (question 13) and performance characteristics (question 14) were difficult to prioritize and should be judged on a rating scale instead. This change was incorporated in the final questionnaire.

Both entry-level skills and performance characteristics were chosen based on the four interviews with public information officers prior to the pilot study. Question 16abc (Are you an Illinois native?) on the survey was irrelevant to the study and was included only upon the request of one of the five pilot study subjects. The final question on the questionnaire (Would you like a copy of the results of this survey ?) was also irrelevant and served as a courtesy to the respondents.

Procedure

The questionnaire was developed with four types of questions. Questions 3, 4, 9, 11, and 13 were designed as "check the range" questions. Content analysis was used to analyze the data provided by subjects in these questions.

Included in these questions were data such as gender, age, length of time working in public information, number of years in present position, and salary. Replies to each question were counted, totaled, and percentages recorded.

The second type of question used called for content analysis as well. Questions 2, 5 through 8, and 10 required short answers. Responses were counted, totaled and recorded according to frequency of occurrences.

The type three question involved univariate statistics and correlation analysis. All calculations were done using the Number Cruncher Statistical System (Hintze, 1986). Data were significant at .05. Questions 13 and 14 asked subjects to rate eight entry-level skills and eight performance characteristics on a scale of one to 10. Responses to each item were averaged and paired correlations were calculated. Spaces were provided for "other" responses to allow subjects to include those skills or characteristics not listed in the two questions.

The final type of question involved open-ended responses to a two-part question. The two parts included attributes of success and advice to someone aspiring to enter the field. Responses were recorded and analyzed phenomenologically. Lanigan's process of phenomenology (1979, p. 7; Parcells, 1986, pp. 59-60) consists of three steps: a) description, b) definition, and c)

interpretation.   After the initial analysis or descriptive process, themes were clustered several times into groups of common meaning (defined), given a title (interpreted), and then ranked according to number of items per theme group.

Chapter II

Results

The objective of this study was to profile a career in public information in the state government.

Content analysis revealed several categories and themes. Question two inquired about the official title of the respondents. The most frequently recorded title was simply Public Information Officer (8 times). Both Director of Communications and Press Secretary received four responses. Sixteen additional variations of official titles were offered and are listed in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

In the gender category, 25 or 66 percent of the 38 respondents were male and 13 or 34 percent were female. Of the 53 surveys distributed, 32 were sent to males and 21 to females. Table 2 reports the gender break down.

Insert Table 2 about here

Question three inquired about the subject's age. Ages were put into clusters of 10 years. Eight percent or three of the respondents were between the ages of 20 and 30; 15 or 40 percent marked the 31 to 40 year category; 37 percent or

14 of the subjects were between 41 and 50 years of age; and 6 or 16 percent reported their age at 51 or over. A complete listing of respondents' ages is included in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Survey questions 5 through 8 were designed to obtain educational information, i.e., degrees earned, areas of study, and institution(s) attended. Of the 38 respondents, four had no formal higher education. Thirty-four subjects (89 percent) earned a Bachelor's degree, 13 or 34 percent held a Master's degree, and two (5 percent) had gone on to complete requirements for a doctoral degree. Three respondents reported having earned an Associate's degree as well. Table 4 lists educational experiences of the respondents.

Insert Table 4 about here

Subjects reported having attended colleges and universities in various areas of the country. As previously mentioned, 13 subjects held a Master's degree. Of those, seven received this portion of their education at Sangamon State University in Springfield, Illinois. The

remaining six attended various colleges or universities. The two doctoral subjects attended University of Delaware and University of Kentucky, respectively. Table 5 gives a complete listing of educational institutions.

Insert Table 5 about here

I was interested in finding out not only where the subjects received their education, but also what majors they chose to prepare for a public information career. The most frequently reported area of study was journalism or a journalism-related area. A total of 62 percent of the Bachelor's degrees were in journalism or a closely related area.

Thirteen subjects majored in journalism, one in electronic journalism, two in radio-television, one in mass communication, one in a combination of journalism and business economics, two in speech communication, and one in science communication. Five respondents studied in the area of English Literature. Table 6 reports the respondents' areas of study for a Bachelor's degree.

Insert Table 6 about here

The most frequently reported Master's degree was Public

Affairs Reporting (PAR) with four of the 13 graduate school
respondents providing this answer. PAR is a journalism
related area as were five additional degrees. These degrees
include: a) communications, b) radio/television economics,
and c) journalism. The remaining four studied government,
educational administration, English, or public
adminstration. The two doctoral degrees were in adult and
higher education and Victorian novel, respectively.
Master's and Doctoral degree responses appear in Table 7.

Insert Table 7 about here

The next section of the survey concerned the length of
time the subjects had worked in public information or a
related field, and the area in which they were first
employed. I was also interested in discovering the
respondents' employment background and the length of time
they had been in their present position.

Question nine concerned the number of years a subject
was employed in public information or a related field.
Years of employment were divided into groups of five years.
Responses to this question were evenly distributed among the
last four ranges. The majority of the subjects (26 percent)
had been in the field or a related field for six to ten
years. Twenty-four percent reported 16 to 20 years; 21

percent reported 21 years or more, and 5 percent had been in
the field or a related field for one to five years.   See
Table 8.

Insert Table 8 about here

The next question required a short answer and inquired
about the area in which the subject was first employed.
This question was designed to help establish a career
background.

The most frequently reported first occupation was
newspaper reporter with nine responses. This question
reflects a strong presence of journalism or journalism-
related occupations. Five subjects reported having been
first employed in radio news and copywriting, three in
broadcast reporting, and one as an editor. Two subjects
responded with a general answer by simply reporting
"journalism" as a first occupation. See Table 9.

Insert Table 9 about here

Survey question 11 was included as part of the career
history and asked respondents how long they had been in
their present position. The range with the most responses
was one to five years with 17 or 45 percent of the total

responses. Twelve or 32 percent of the responses fell into
the six to ten year group and five or 13 percent marked the
11 to 15 year category. One subject recounted having worked
in his/her present position for 21 or more years. Table 10
reports the results of question 11.

Insert Table 10 about here

Salary is an element of a career profile that may be of
interest to those who are looking at a career in public
information. Question 12 asked respondents to mark the
range in which their present salary fell. Salary figures
were put into ranges of $10,000 in order to make respondents
more comfortable in revealing what some may consider a
personal piece of information. Table 11 shows the results
of the salary inquiry.

Insert Table 11 about here

Questions 13 and 14 involved the rating of entry-level
skills and performance characteristics in a public
information career. Both questions were analyzed using
univariate statistics and correlation analysis.

The entry-level skill category asked respondents to
rate eight skills needed for a career in public information

on a scale from one to 10. The highest rating received was in the writing category (mean= 9.12). Editing was the next highest skill as it was rated 7.53 (mean). Means were considered high if they fell above 5.0. Table 12 lists the means for the remaining entry-level skills.

Insert Table 12 about here

The eight entry-level skills were also subjected to paired correlation. Data were significant at .05. Twenty-four pairs of entry-level skills were significantly correlated. Table 13 lists the correlation figures for entry-level skills.

Insert Table 13 about here

The eight performance characteristics were rated in question 14. Sixteen pairs of characteristics were significantly correlated and are listed in Table 14.

Insert Table 14 about here

Means for all eight characteristics fell above 5.0. The item rated highest was creativity (7.82) with crisis management falling closely behind (7.68). Table 15 consists

of the mean scores for the performance characteristics.

Insert Figure 15 about here

Both questions (13 and 14) included an "other" category which allowed space for subjects to provide skills or characteristics not listed. In the entry-level skills category, eight additional items were included. Skills and rating scores are identified in Table 16.

Insert Table 16 about here

Ten items were recorded in the "other" category in response to the performance characeteristics question. Table 17 gives a complete listing of the items and their rating scores.

Insert Table 17 about here

Several themes emerged from the "other" category in both questions. These themes are listed with rank ordered items in Table 18.

Insert Table 18 about here

Question 15 (a and b) asked respondents to provide attributes of their success in public information and give advice to someone aspiring to a career in the field. Six general themes emerged after analysis. The most repeated theme provided by the respondents was a number of descriptive Personality Attributes. Tables 19 (a through f) list these themes and their items in rank order.

Insert Tables 19 (a through f) about here

The second part of question 15 asked subjects to provide advice to someone aspiring to enter the field of public information. Five themes emerged from data provided by the subjects. Recommendations for Specific Job Skills made up the strongest theme. A complete listing of the themes and their inclusive items in rank order appear in Tables 20 (a through e).

Insert Tables 20 (a through e) about here

Chapter IV

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to profile a career in public information at a management level in state government.

Analysis

Questions two required respondents to provide their official working title. Nineteen various titles were offered with Public Information Officer being the most recurring title.

The majority of the titles recorded included a management term, i.e., chief, director, or manager, because the survey-questionnaire was distributed to personnel at the management level. Three terms or phrases were dominant in this question including: a) public information, b) public affairs, and c) communication.

In my opinion, the various titles can be accounted for by the vast differences in the 38 responding agencies. Each agency has a specific task and most likely gives its managing public information person an appropriate title.

Respondents in this study were predominantly male. Survey-questionnaires were mailed out to 32 males (25 responded) and 21 females (13 responded). Gender is an issue that may not be legitimately explained, but one explanation for the low number of female practitioners

is offered by Pavlik (1987).

According to Pavlik, women tend to occupy lower, entry-level positions...college-level public relations education has also been a somewhat different experience for women than for men (p. 85). Pavlik (1987) believes that females have had fewer role models than men and have been encouraged to view public relations as a communication function rather than a management function (p. 85).

Respondents were also asked their age. This study reveals that the majority of the upper management public information personnel were between the ages of 31 and 50. This data tells me that public information at this level is not something one can enter right out of college.

This question also goes hand in hand with question nine (the number of years a respondent was employed in public information or a related field) and question 11 (how long have you been in your present position?). Twenty-six percent of the respondents had been in the field or a related field for six to ten years and the majority (45 percent) had been in their present position one to five years.

Respondents between the ages of 31 and 40 could logically have worked in the field six to ten years and have been in their present position one to five years.

I also found it interesting that while six of the respondents were 51 years of age or older and reported having been in the field 21 years or more, only one had been in his/her present position more than 21 years.

Respondents were asked to record their first occupation as well. This question and four additional questions were part of the establishment of a career and educational background needed to enter the public information field.

A general theme emerged from the reports of first occupations. As previously reported, a large number of respondents were employed in a media-related area. Occupations in newspaper, television, and radio were reported frequently, indicating that experience in the media may be significant factor when considering a career in public information.

While media occupations were dominant, a number of unrelated careers were reported as well. Occupations ranged from teacher to bank examiner and this indicates that it is possible to get into the public information field after beginning ones employment in a totally unrelated area.

After assessing the results of the survey-questionnaire education questions it is evident that a Bachelor's degree is necessary for this career. Of the 38 respondents, only four had not completed a Bachelor's degree.

As indicated by the responses, a Master's degree is not necessarily a mandate for a career in public information. Of those 13 respondents who did report having a Master's degree, 9 studied in a journalism-related area. Those with Bachelor's degrees majored in a variety of areas with 13 similar majors in journalism or a related area.

Additional majors with no similarities were also reported by those with Bachelor's and Master's degrees. This may indicate that a career in public information doesn't demand a specific area of study. But, the journalism/media theme was present here as well.

The two doctoral respondents reported dissimilar areas of study which did not fit into the general journalism theme. In general, it is evident that a doctoral degree is not necessary for a career in public information, even at the upper management level.

When establishing a career profile, salary is a factor that is often of great interest. Responses to the survey-questionnaire indicate that the majority of the salaries were above $41,000. Because salaries were put in ranges , it was not possible to determine an average salary or a top end of the range. There were reports of salaries in the $61,000 and up range, so a definite ceiling salary is not predictable.

While reported salaries did not fall below $21,000, several respondents did mark the &$21,000 to $40,000 range. This indicates that salary level may depend on several factors such as years of experience, level of education, or type of agency. Unfortunately, this type of measuring device does not allow for specific explanations for salary figures.

Questions 13 and 14 asked respondents to rate both entry-level skills and performance characteristics on a scale of one to 10. According to the mean scores, respondents felt that writing was a very important entry-level skill. Other highly rated scores include editing and research. These three skills seem to fit into a journalism theme.

Social skills were also rated relatively high although several respondents made comments about this item. Comments stated that the term "social skills" was not easily defined and appeared to be an abstract term. The intended definition concerned social poise, etiquette, general person-to-person skills and manners one would express in a social setting. Because of the ambiguity of this term, scores may not reflect a true meaning.

Word processing was another relatively high rated skill. I believe that this skill fits nicely with writing, editing, and research as computer literacy is becoming the

norm in many occupations.

Another skill that resulted in a relatively high mean was political knowledge. Since this study was conducted in state government, it is reasonable to think that knowledge of politics and the processes involved is a very relevant skill to have.

Desk-top publishing and general business knowledge were both relatively high scorers. Many respondents indicated that general business knowledge was an ambiguous term as well and rated it accordingly. Comments indicated that desk-top publishing may be more important in some agencies than in others and that it will become more important in the future.

Performance characteristics were rated on a scale of one to 10. All eight were rated highly. Creativity was the highest rated characteristic, followed closely by crisis management, and then flexibility.

Creativity was most likely rated high because of its relation to writing, which was also highly rated. Crisis management is a task that most public information officers have to deal with at one time or another because they are representing governmental agencies which do have crises at times. I believe flexibility is a quality or characteristic needed by anyone who is part of a public relations profession.

Leadership and decision-making are characteristics which were rated relatively high by the repondents. Time management and prioritizing are also similar characteristics. I believe all of these terms to be characteristic of someone at the management level. There was one item which was similar to leadership but did not rate high. This was delegation of authority.

As reported in the results section, 24 pairs of entry-level skills and 16 pairs of performance characteristics were signigicantly correlated. By definition, entry-level skills are those skills needed to obtain a position in public information while performance characteristics are those needed to keep the job and achieve in the field.

Writing was correlated with seven other entry-level skills. Of these seven, research, editing, creativity, and decision-making were highly significant. Excluding decision-making, I believe that these four skills are part of the recurring journalism theme found throughout the study. Several other pairs of entry-level skills can be considered as part of this theme as well, including research with editing, and desk-top publishing with writing and word processing.

Political knowledge also had several skills paired with it that were significantly correlated. Social skills, general business knowledge, decision-making, and crisis

management were all reminiscent of work in the state government. Logically, a person would want to be trained in the social graces, have some business knowledge, and have the ability to make sound decisions when working at the management level in a government agency.

As previously mentioned, crisis management is important for those people who must at times, present a critical situation to the general public.

There were various pairs of entry-level skills that were significantly correlated, but lacked logical explanation. For example, social skills were significantly correlated with prioritizing. I believe some pairs were statistically significant because of the variety of definitions that could have been given to some of the entry-level skills.

Of the 16 pairs of performance characteristics, decision-making correlated with the most items. The large number of correlated pairs indicates that decision-making is a major factor in the daily life of someone in public information at the management level.

Leadership was another strongly recommended performance characteristic as it significantly correlated with crisis management, creativity, and delegation of authority. Crisis management also correlated with political knowledge, decision-making, and flexibility. Judging from the strong

statistics involving crisis management, this characteristic
is definitely important in a public information career.

Prioritizing was also a strongly correlated term.
According to the respondents, decision-making, flexibility,
and time management are part of or compliment the ability to
prioritize.

Respondents were provided with an "other" category when
rating entry-level skills and performance characteristics.
Themes were evident in both "other" categories. Recurring
ideas or comments included media experience, verbal and oral
communication skills, political savvy, and guidelines for
work in public information. One of the most highly
recommended skills was the command of basic English, grammar
and punctuation.

Common items in the performance characteristic section
referred to maturity. Good judgement, the ability to follow
through, courtesy, initiative, and responsibility were all
suggestions made by respondents when responding to an
"other" category.

Respondents also had an opportunity to provide written
comments about success attributes and general entry-level
advice. Several themes emerged from this portion of the
study.

After analysis, six general themes emerged from data
provided in the inquiry concerning attributes of success.

The most repeated theme taken from the respondents' comments consisted of a number of ideas I have entitled Personality Attributes.

According to the respondents, the ability to work well with others tops the list in this theme. Additional attributes that made a strong showing include accuracy, integrity, perserverance, and creativity.

The second emergent theme was entitled Vocational Skills and included suggestions for skills that could be learned. Writing seemed to be the strongest recommendation in this theme. Writing in general has been the predominant factor in the recurring journalism/media theme of the entire study.

The next theme I simply entitled Experience because this term appeared many times in the comments made by respondents. This theme fit into the general theme of the study, and respondents indicated that work in the media and experience in advertising and public relations were attributes of success in public information.

Theme four was comprised of items collectively entitled Need to Know. Respondents attributed success to their knowledge of and exposure to the media, their ability to anticipate events, and their knowledge of government and politics. One respondent also added the ability to know all aspects of the respective agency as a success attribute.

Attitude Characteristics was the title given to theme five. Respondents reported that a good attitude, agressiveness and self-motivation were the key attributes for success in the public information field. The final theme consisted of a variety of comments which didn't fit into any other category. This theme was simply entitled Other. Items here included a strong showing of hard work and luck and good fortune as success attributes.

When asked to provide advice to someone aspiring to enter the public information field, respondents made a variety of suggestions. This data resulted in five themes.

The most predominant ideas fell into a theme entitled Recommendations for Specific Job Skills. Once again, writing emerged as the leading required skill. The skills listed also fit nicely into the general journalism theme of the study. Editing, reading, research and analytical skills, and interpersonal skills were additional recurring items in this theme.

Formal Education was the title given to advice about coursework and training for a career in public information. Respondents indicated that courses in speech and public speaking would be helpful as would general computer coursework, i.e., desk-top publishing and/or word processing.

Suggestions were also made to determine an area of study early on an concentrate on it. Additional advice involved coursework in government, history, political science, and business-related areas.

The third emergent theme was entitled Practical Experience/Informal Education. Recommedations made by respondents in this category included experience with or in media and practical experience while in college. Several suggestions were made to seek out internships, fellowships, work/study programs, etc...

Respondents also included several pieces of advice pertaining to On-the-Job-Advice. These items represented the fourth theme and included paying attention to detail, joining professional groups, and finding a mentor in the field. Respondents also recommended reading trade journals, accepting advice from others, and trying new ideas.

The final emergent theme consisted of items entitled Character Traits. Honesty and ethics were two traits which were strongly recommended. A number of these traits were qualities most likely desirable in any occupation. These included cooperative, outgoing, having common sense, and creativity.

One respondent deserves a theme of his or her own which is entitled Discouragements. This respondent stated, "Forget it! It's a field that's already glutted with yuppie

hacks."

Implications

If one were to summarize the data provided by respondents in order to describe a typical person in public information at the management level, it may be similar to the following.

Public Information Officers (or similar title) in state government at the management level are predominantly male, between the ages of 31 and 50, and have worked in the public information field or a related field for six to 10 years. The average respondent began his/her career in media, i.e., television, radio, or newspaper, has a Bachelor's degree, and makes $41,000 or more annually.

The ability to write seems to be the predominant skill needed for entry-level work and while on the job. Performance characteristics in this field include creativity, the ability to manage in a crisis situation, and flexibility. Obviously, at the management level, this person must be able to lead and make decisions. Personal traits of a typical PIO may include: a) hard worker, b) honest, c) the ability to work well with others, and d) common sense..

The general theme expressed throughout the data seemed to be the need or importance of experience, knowledge of, or skills related to journalism and/or media.

Limitations

This study had its limitations primarily because it was conducted using only one state government. It is not realistic to think that each state has identical agencies with the same public information needs and personnel. This limitation should be kept in mind when the reader attempts to make generalizations about a career in public information.

Also, the type of questionnaire used in the study did not allow for in-depth responses. Some terms chosen for use in questions were ambiguous and may have been interpreted in a variety of ways. Therefore, some responses were open to interpretation by me as well, and may not have reflected the actual intent of the respondent.

Future Research

This study involved respondents from only one state government. I think a more conclusive study would involve several state governments and possibly public information personnel at various levels of the occupation.

More research needs to be done on the differences between public information and public relations in general. I believe that this would help establish public information as more of a separate field.

Also, public information is not limited to government. A study using other non-profit institutions such as colleges

or universities, trade associations, or volunteer agencies may be useful in defining the field of public information.

Another suggestion for additional research would be to implement face-to-face interviews with the subjects. I believe that this would alleviate the ambiguity problem and allow for more in-depth data.

Public information, in my opinion, is an area that demands more attention from researchers. I would like to see more information about the field included in public relations textbooks and in coursework. Future research into the elements of public information may help to achieve this.

Table 1

Respondents' Official Titles

Rank	Title	Responses
1	Public Information Officer	8
2	Press Secretary	4
	Director of Communication	4
3	Director, Public Information	2
	Chief, Division of Communication	2
4	Director	1

Chief, Office of Communication
    & Community Relations
Manager, Information Services
Deputy Chief of Staff
Chief of Public Information & Advocacy
Chief of Public Information
Manager, Bureau of Information Services
Special Assistant for Public Affairs
Executive Director
Administrative Assistant
Chief of Communication
Division Manager
Executive Assistant PIO

Table 2
Respondent Break-Down by Gender

	Sent Out	Returned	%
Male	32	25	66
Female	21	13	34

Table 3

Respondent Break-Down by Age

20-30	31-40	41-50	51 & up
3	15	14	6

Table 4

Level of Higher Education

None	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctorate	Associate
4	34	13	2	3

Table 5a

Institutions of Higher Education Attended by Respondents
With a Associate's Degree

Institution	Responses
Parkland College	1
Monticello College	1
Illinois Valley Community College	1
Total:	3

Table 5b

Institutions Attended by Respondents With a Bachelor's Degree

Institution	Responses
Southern Illinois University	7
Loyola University	2
University of Illinois	2
Western Illinois University	2
Northwestern University	2
Northern Illinois University	2
University of Illinois, Chicago	2
MacMurray College	2
Hiram College	1
University of Nebraska	
Southwestern Minnesota	
Union College	
William Smith College	
Hanover College	
University of Wisconsin	
Knox College	
Arizone State University	
Marquette University	
Illinois State University	
Indiana University	
Lewis University	
Total:	34

Table 5c

Institutions Attended by Respondents With a Master's Degree

Institution	Responses
Sangamon State University	7
Northwestern University	1
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale	1
Union College	1
University of Illinois, Chicago	1
University of Illinois, Urbana	1
University of Wisconsin	1
Total:	13

Table 5d

Institutions Attended by Respondents With a Doctorate

Institution	Responses
University of Delaware	1
University of Kentucky	1
Total:	2

Table 6

Area of Study for Respondents with a Bachelor's Degree

Rank	Major	Responses
1	Journalism	13
2	English	3
3	English Literature	2
	Radio/Television	2
	Political Science	2
	Speech Communication	2
4	Government	1
	Criminal Justice	1
	Philosophy	1
	Electronic Journalism	1
	Public Administration	1
	Mass Communication	1
	Journalism/Business Communication	1
	Science Communication	1

Table 7

Areas of Study for Master's and Doctoral Degrees

Master's

Rank	Major	Responses
1	Public Affairs Reporting	4
2	Communication	2
3	Journalism	1
	Government	1
	Education Administration	1
	Radio/Television Economics	1
	Radio/Television	1
	English	1
	Public Adminstration	1

Doctorate

1	Adult & Higher Education	1
	Victorian Novel	1

Table 8

Number of Years Respondents Have Been in the Field or a
Related Field

Range/Years	Responses	%
1-5	2	5
6-10	10	26
11-15	9	24
16-20	9	24
21-up	8	21

Table 9

Respondent's First Occupations

Rank	Occupation	Responses
1	Newspaper Reporter	9
2	Radio News & Copywriter	5
3	Broadcast Reporter	3
	Public Information	3
4	Journalism	2
5	Public Relations	1
	Marketing & Sales	1
	Technical Writing/ Corporate Communication	1
	Teacher	1
	Bank Examiner	1
	Auto Insurance Underwriter	1
	City Government	1
	Publishing	1
	Student Services	1
	Board of Ethics	1
	Legislative Research	1
	State Trooper	1

Table 10

Number of Years Respondents Have Been in Present Position

Range/Years	Responses	%
1-5	17	49
6-10	12	34
11-15	5	14
16-20	0	0
21-up	1	3

Table 11

Respondents' Annual Salaries

Salary Range	Responses	%
$10,000-20,000	0	0
21,000-30,000	4	12
31,000-40,000	3	9
41,000-50,000	12	36
51,000-60,000	10	30
61,000-up	4	12
No Response	5	15

Table 12

Rating Means for Entry-Level Skills

Rank	Skill	Mean
1	Writing	9.12
2	Editing	7.53
3	Research	6.85
4	Social Skills	6.82
5	Political Knowledge	5.82
6	Word Processing	5.26
7	General Business Knowledge	4.88
8	Desk-top Publising	3.88

Table 13

Paired Correlations for Entry-Level Skills

Significant at .05

Skill	Paired Skill	r	p
Writing	Desk-Top Publishing	.44	.01
	Research	-.37	.03
	Editing	.60	.00
	Creativity	.59	.00
	Decision-Making	.52	.00
	Flexibility	.39	.02
	Prioritizing	.38	.03
Research	Social Skills	.42	.01
	Editing	.42	.01
Desk-Top Publishing	Word Processing	.41	.02
	General Business Knowledge	.52	.00
Political Knowledge	Social Skills	.40	.02
	General Business Knowledge	.48	.00
	Creativity	.34	.05
	Decision-Making	.37	.03
	Crisis Management	.39	.02
Social Skills	Decision-Making	.48	.01
	Prioritizing	.36	.04
Editing	Decision-Making	.36	.04
	Prioritizing	.35	.04
Word Processing	Time Management	.35	.04
General Business Knowledge	Work Processing	.40	.02

Table 14

Rating Means for Performance Characteristics

Rank	Skill	Mean
1	Creativity	7.82
2	Crisis Management	7.68
3	Flexibility	7.44
4	Prioritizing	7.24
5	Decision-Making	7.18
6	Time Management	7.15
7	Leadership	6.88
8	Delegation of Authority	5.68

Table 15

Paired Correlations for Performance Characteristics

Significant at .05

Skill	Paired Skill	r	p
Leadership	Creativity	.42	.01
	Crisis Management	.48	.00
	Delegation of Authority	.50	.00
Creativity	Decision-Making	.35	.04
	Delegation of Authority	.42	.02
Decision-Making	Crisis Management	.67	.00
	Flexibility	.63	.00
	Time Management	.43	.01
	Prioritizing	.67	.00
Crisis Management	Flexibility	.56	.00
Prioritizing	Flexibility	.54	.00
	Time Management	.74	.00

Table 16

"Other" Items Listed as Entry-Level Skills

Rank	Skill	Rating	Responses
1	Basic English, Grammar Punctuation	10	11
2	Verbal/Oral Communication	10	10
3	Media Knowledge	8	1
	Maturity	10	1
	Judgement	10	1
	Photography, Video Skills	-	1
	Creativity/Graphic Design	-	1
	Knowledge of Issues	-	1

Table 17

"Other" Items Listed as Performance Characteristics

Skill	Rating	Responses
Initiative	10	1
Judgement	10	1
Follow Through	10	1
Responsible for Work Activity	10	1
Attitude	-	2
Courtesy/Political Savvy	-	2
Diplomacy	-	1
Inquisitiveness	-	1
Oral/Written Expression	-	1
Complete Understanding of What You Present	-	1

Table 18a

Personality Attributes

Rank	Themes	Responses
1	Work well with others	5
2	Accuracy and integrity	4
3	Perserverance	3
	Accuracy	3
	Creativity	3
4	Detail	2
	Objectivity	2
5	Patience	1
	Tact	1
	High Standards	1
	Credibility	1
	Common Sense	1
	Adapt to Change	1

Table 18b

Vocational Skills

Rank	Themes	Responses
1	Writing	13
2	Research	4
3	Reading	3
	Media Relations	3
4	Editing	2
	Organizational	2
	Communication	2
5	Social	1
	Listening	1
	Analytical	1
	Decision-Making	1
	Stress Management	1

Table 18c

Experience

Rank	Themes	Responses
1	Experience	10
2	Work in Media	9
3	Experience in Public Relations and Advertising	3

Table 18d

<u>Need to Know</u>

Rank	Themes	Responses
1	Exposure to Media	3
2	Anticipation of Events	2
3	Know All Aspects of Agency Government and Politics	1 1

Table 18e

Attitude Characteristics

Rank	Themes	Responses
1	Good Attitude	3
2	Aggressive	1
	Confidence in Self	1
	Self-Motivated	1
	Competitive	1
	Professionalism	1
	Enjoy Job	1

Table 18f

Other

Rank	Themes	Responses
1	Hard Work	11
2	Luck & Good Fortune	5
3	Behind the Scenes Work	2
4	Good Staff	1
	Committment to Public Service	1

Table 19a

Recommendations for Specific Job Skills

Rank	Themes	Responses
1	Writing	19
2	English & Grammar	4
	Reading	4
3	Research/Analytical Skills	3
4	Editing	2
	Interpersonal/People Skills	2
5	Social Skills	1
	Broad Range of Communication Skills	1
	Typing	1

Table 19b

Formal Education

Rank	Themes	Responses
1	Computer Knowledge	5
	Public Speaking/Speech Courses	5
2	Liberal Arts Courses	4
3	Government and Politics	3
4	Courses in History, Political Science, Business-Related	2
	Determine an Area of Study and Concentrate on it	2
5	Behaviorial Science Courses	1
	Marketing Courses	1
	Coursework in Politics & Journalism	1
	Graphic Design	1
	Education Depends on Specific Agency	1
	Get a Diverse Education	1
	Coursework in a Broad Range of Communications	1

Table 19c

Practical/Informal Education

Rank	Themes	Responses
1	Seek out college or practical experiences, i.e., interships, fellowships, newspaper, any media experience	11
2	Experience	6
3	Establish Background in Media	5
4	Learn Media Relations/Assessibility	1
	Continue to Learn After College	1

Table 19d

On-the-Job-Advice

Rank	Themes	Responses
1	Pay attention to detail	2
	Read trade journals/keep abreast of field	2
2	Don't accept no as an answer	1
	Accept advice from others	1
	Try new things	1
	Find a mentor	1
	Surround yourself with excellency	1
	Depending on size of agency, know all aspects of operations	1
	Never be content with work, strive	1
	Join professional groups	1
	Attend conferences	1

Table 19e

Character Traits

Rank	Themes	Responses
1	Honesty	3
2	Ethics	2
3	Common sense	1
	Creativity	1
	Outgoing	1
	Responsive	1
	Humility	1

Appendix A

Survey-Questionnaire Used in Actual Study

Coleman Hall #119
Dept. of Speech Communication
Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, IL 61920
April 23, 1990

XXXXX XXXXXXX
XXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXX, XXXXXXX

Dear X,

I am a graduate student at Eastern Illinois University
currently working on my Master's Degree in
Communications. Over the course of my educational
career, I have become interested in public information.
But, I have found that textbooks do not provide the
information needed to become adequately informed about
the career.

I am working on a thesis: <u>A Career Profile in Public
Information</u>. I feel that this study, when completed,
will provide accurate and relevant information for those
who are interested in learning more about public
information as a career. I also hope to reveal necessary
entry-level skills and characteristics needed to achieve
in public information.

Please complete the enclosed survey and return it in the
self-addressed, stamped envelope provided for you.
Please return the survey by <u>May 1</u>, <u>1990</u>. The results
will be available to you upon your reply to survey
question 17. Thank you for your time and help with this
project.

Sincerely,

Enc.

Please respond to the following questions:
(Type or Print please)

1. Name:_____

2. Title:_____

3. Sex: _____Male   _____Female

4. Please mark the range in which your age falls:

    _____20-30   _____31-40   _____41-50   _____51-up

5. Please complete the following with regard to your educational
   background:

   a. Did you receive a Bachelor's Degree? _____yes   _____no

      If so, what school did you attend?_____

   b. Did you receive a Master's Degree? _____yes   _____no

      If so, what school did you attend?_____

   c. Did your receive a Doctoral Degree? _____yes   _____no

      If so, what school did you attend?_____

   d. If you received a degree not listed, please specify:

      Other_____   School attended?_____

6. If you answered yes to question (5a), please indicate your
   undergraduate major:

   _____

7. If you answered yes to question (5b), please indicate the area
   of study in your graduate degree:

   _____

8. If you answered yes to question (5c), please indicate the area of study:

   _____

9. How long have you worked in public information or a related field?

   _____1-5 years   _____6-10 years   _____11-15 years

   _____16-20 years   _____21-up

10. Please indicate the area in which you were <u>first</u> employed:

    _____

11. Please mark the range which represents the number of years you have been in your present position:

    _____1-5 years   _____6-10   _____11-15   _____16-20

    _____21-up

12. Please mark the range in which your present salary falls:

    _____$10-20,000   _____$21-30,000   _____$31-40,000

    _____$41-50,000   _____51-60,000   _____$61,000-up

13. Please rank (1 high 9 low) the following skills according to to their importance in an entry-level position in public information:

    _____Writing

    _____Research

    _____Desk-top Publishing

    _____Political Knowledge

    _____Social Skills

    _____Editing

    _____Word Processing

    _____General Business Knowledge

    _____Other (please specify)_____

14. Please rate (1 low 10 high) the following performance
    characteristics according to their importance in a public
    information position (example: if you think leadership is
    very important, mark it 10):

    _____Leadership

    _____Creativity

    _____Decision-making

    _____Crisis Management

    _____Flexibility

    _____Time Management

    _____Prioritizing

    _____Delegation of Authority

    _____Other (please specify)_____

15. Please use the space provided to respond to the following
    questions:

    a. To what would you attribute your success?

    b. If you were to give advice to someone aspiring to enter
       the public information field, what would it be?

16. Are you an Illinois native? _____yes _____no

    a. If you answered yes to question 16, previous to your
       present position, from what city did you come?

       _____

    b. If you answered no to question 16, from what state did you
       come?

       _____

17. Would you like a copy of the results of this survey?

    _____yes _____no

    * Thank you for taking time to complete this survey.

Appendix B

Survey-Questionnaire Used in Pilot Study

Coleman Hall #119
Dept. of Speech Communication
Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, IL 61920
March 23, 1990

XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXX
XXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX, XXXXX

Dear X,

I am a graduate student at Eastern Illinois University
currently working toward a Master's Degree in
Communication. Over the course of my studies, I have
become interested in public information, but have found
that textbooks do not relay all the information needed to
become fully informed.

At present, I am working on a thesis: <u>A Vocational
Profile in Public Information</u>. The first step in this
process is to construct a survey that will produce the
desired information. This is where I need your help. I
have chosen a small samply of department/section heads in
Illinois Public Information to be part of a pilot study.
You are one of these people.

I feel that this study, when completed, will provide
accurate and relevant information for those who are
interested in learning more about the field, how they can
prepare, and what it takes to become successful.

The enclosed survey is designed to produce data that will
help me to compile the desired information. It would be
greatly appreciated if you would take a few minutes out
of your schedule to complete the survey and return it to
me. The results will be available to you upon request
(see question 18).

Enclosed you will find a self-addressed, stamped envelope
in which to return your survey. If at all possible, I
would like to have the survey returned by <u>April 3, 1990</u>.
Thank you for your time and help with this project.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Forney
Enc.

Please respond to the following questions:
(Type or Print please)

1. Name:_____

2. Title:_____

3. Sex: _____Male   _____Female

4. Please mark the range in which your age falls:

   _____20-30   _____31-40   _____41-50   _____51-up

5. Please complete the following with regard to your educational background:

   a. Did you receive a Bachelor's Degree? _____yes   _____no

      If so, what school did you attend?_____

   b. Did you receive a Master's Degree? _____yes   _____no

      If so, what school did you attend?_____

   c. Did your receive a Doctoral Degree? _____yes   _____no

      If so, what school did you attend?_____

   d. If you received a degree not listed, please specify:

      Other_____   School attended?_____

6. If you answered yes to question (5a), please indicate your undergraduate major:

   _____Journalism   _____Communication   _____Public Relations

   _____Business   _____Political Science

   Other (please specify):_____

7. If you answered yes to question (5b), please indicate the area of study in your graduate degree:

   _____Journalism   _____Communication   _____Public Relations

   _____Business   _____Political Science

   Other (please specify):_____

8. If you answered yes to question (5c), please indicate the area of study:

_____Journalism   _____Communication   _____Public Relations

_____Business   _____Political Science

Other (please specify):_____

9. How long have you worked in public information or a related field?

_____1-5 years   _____6-10 years   _____11-15 years

_____16-20 years   _____21-up

10. Please indicate the area in which you were first employed:

_____

11. Please mark the range which represents the number of years you have been in your present position:

_____1-5 years   _____6-10   _____11-15   _____16-20

_____21-up

12. Please mark the range in which your present salary falls:

_____$10-20,000   _____$21-30,000   _____$31-40,000

_____$41-50,000   _____51-60,000   _____$61,000-up

13. Please rank (1 high 9 low) the following skills according to to their importance in an entry-level position in public information:

_____Writing

_____Research

_____Desk-top Publishing

_____Political Knowledge

_____Social Skills

_____Editing

_____Word Processing

_____General Business Knowledge

_____Other (please specify)_____

14. Please rank (1 high 9 low) the following performance characteristics according to their importance in a public   . information position:

_____Leadership

_____Creativity

_____Decision-making

_____Crisis Management

_____Flexibility

_____Time Management

_____Prioritizing

_____Delegation of Authority

_____Other (please specify)_____

15. Please use the space provided to respond to the following questions:

a. To what would you attribute your success?

b. If you were to give advice to someone aspiring to enter the public information field, what would it be?

16. Are you an Illinois native? _____yes   _____no

    a. If you answered yes to question 16, previous to your present position, from what city did you come?

       _____

    b. If you answered no to question 16, from what state did you come?

       _____

17. If you have suggestions for additions or improvements in this survey, please use the following space to reply:

18. Would you like a copy of the results of this survey?

    _____yes   _____no

    * Thank you for taking time to complete this survey.