

Proceedings of the New York State Communication Association

Volume 2022

Article 2

August 2023

Communicating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: A Public Relations Class/Client Partnership with a DEI Focus

Arien Rozelle

St. John Fisher University, arozelle@sjfc.edu

Nicole Smith

St. John Fisher University, njs06565@sjfc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.rwu.edu/nyscaproceedings>



Part of the [Public Relations and Advertising Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rozelle, Arien and Smith, Nicole (2023) "Communicating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: A Public Relations Class/Client Partnership with a DEI Focus," *Proceedings of the New York State Communication Association*: Vol. 2022, Article 2.

Available at: <https://docs.rwu.edu/nyscaproceedings/vol2022/iss1/2>

This Great Ideas for Teaching Students (GIFTS) is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DOCS@RWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Proceedings of the New York State Communication Association by an authorized editor of DOCS@RWU. For more information, please contact mwu@rwu.edu.

NYSCA Conference 2022 GIFT

Communicating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: A Public Relations Class/Client Partnership with a DEI Focus

RATIONALE: Our era of heightened activism coupled with the challenges brought forth by a global pandemic have highlighted the need for greater advancement in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the field of public relations and communication. And yet, “Despite numerous calls and initiatives for change for over three decades, the industry’s D&I needle has barely moved” (Bardhan and Gower, 2020).

Today’s students are tomorrow’s practitioners, and educators have the ability to impact the pipeline from the classroom to the boardroom through exposure to courses and coursework that bring topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion to the forefront. Indeed, the Commission on Public Relations Education’s report on undergraduate PR education, *Foundations + Future State. Educators + Practitioners*, notes “Efforts to improve D&I knowledge must start at the academic level. We recommend educators place focus on how diversity and multicultural perspectives are taught in the classroom and commit to integrating D&I focused topics and discussions in the curriculum” (p. 139).

College and university libraries present a unique opportunity for partnership with public relations courses, as they are highly visible locations on campus where a diverse mix of students gather daily. Partnering with libraries to inform students about DEI initiatives has the potential to maximize impact in public relations classrooms and on campuses. After all, it has been shared that “for public libraries to continue to succeed in a quickly changing society, vibrant leadership is required from librarians who will take risks and grasp emerging opportunities” (Phillips 2014). A PR class/client partnership could enhance the client experience for public relations students and aid in campus libraries’ efforts to communicate about DEI both in their own building and/or across campus.

This project allows students to learn more about DEI and consider the ways that DEI can be communicated with diverse audiences. Through this project, students can conduct research (campus-wide surveys, focus groups), craft content (ex: DEI statements), plan events on campus (ex: Diversity Festivals) and establish partnerships (ex: Black Student Union, Latino Student Union, LGBTQ+ groups) that give them hands-on experience communicating about DEI to diverse audiences.

GOALS/STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES: This semester-long project was used in PR Research and Planning (a campaigns course). The student learning outcomes for this project correspond with student learning outcomes from the course syllabus:

- Enhance students’ understanding of problems facing organizations and the ways public relations expertise can help solve those problems through a hands-on project with a real client.
- Give students an opportunity to determine, analyze and develop programs to solve problems.
- Give students hands-on experience preparing real public relations campaigns for actual clients.
- Enable students to understand and effectively apply strategic communications planning processes, problem-solving strategies, and operational techniques.
- Enhance students’ ability to design, carry out, and analyze professional-quality projects to address client needs related to public relations and/or reputation management.

EVIDENCE OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES: This project was created to align with the learning outcomes stated above. Here is a brief sampling of student remarks on the course:

“I love how hands-on [this class] was, and a lot of this work mirrors the work I’ve done in internships, so I believe this is a really great way for students to get hands-on experience, as well as great portfolio work.”

Student responses from a campus-wide survey following the implementation of DEI focused campaigns:

- “I think what has happened this semester is fantastic...”
- “I love how the Library has begun to look for ways of improvement when it comes to inclusion on campus.”

REFERENCES:

- Bardhan, N., & Gower, K. (2020, August 15). *Student and faculty/educator views on diversity and inclusion in public relations: The role of leaders in bringing about change*. Journal of Public Relations Education. Retrieved May 10, 2022, from <https://aejmc.us/jpre/2020/08/15/student-and-faculty-educator-views-on-diversity-and-inclusion-in-public-relations-the-role-of-leaders-in-bringing-about-change/>
- Mundy, D., Lewton, K., Hicks, A., & Neptune, T. (2018). Diversity. In *Fast forward: Foundations + future state. Educators + practitioners: The Commission on Public Relations Education 2017 Report on undergraduate education* (pp. 139-146). Commission on Public Relations Education. <http://www.commissionpred.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/report6-full.pdf>
- Phillips, A.L. (2014). What Do We Mean by Library Leadership? Leadership in LIS Education. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 55, 336-344.

ASSIGNMENT DETAILS:

Communicating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: A Public Relations Class/Client Partnership with a DEI Focus

This project was created for an upper-level Public Relations Research & Planning course in an in-person setting but can be adapted for other PR campaigns classes, or to a course related to Public Relations and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). While this project mirrors what most campaigns courses do - hands-on, experiential work with a client partner - the key difference is that this project is specifically DEI focused. In order to execute the project, the professor must first establish that there is an interest/need to communicate with the student body about campus-wide or library specific DEI efforts. Then, the professor and class will work with the Library Director or another point of contact at the Library to execute the project.

Students are broken up into agencies with 4 to 5 students each, and assigned the following:

1. Research, plan, execute and measure a DEI focused campaign utilizing the campus library as your client.
2. Following the execution and measurement of the campaign, develop a case study and case presentation.

Using the ROSTIR planning process as a starting point, students will identify the research needed in order to craft the campaign, identify objectives, and draw on public relations theories to guide strategies and tactics. Once students have identified the research and theories needed - including research about DEI and theories about race and diversity - they will implement their campaign. They will then measure results. Lastly, they will present their findings to the class and the client to make connections between research, theory, and practice.

As this is a semester-long project in a campaigns course, the details for each assignment can be left up to the instructor, as they likely already have scaffolded assignments as part of the course. The key component of this project is the DEI focus and the partnership with the campus library, which can be plugged into existing campaign assignments.

By adapting a typical campaigns style course to partner with the campus library on a DEI focused campaign, this project will allow students to consider diverse audiences at every step of the way, and make an impact on their own campus. From conducting primary research in the form of campus-wide surveys and focus groups, to the development of key messages and the potential for partnerships, this project can introduce students to the vital role that communicators play in communicating about DEI efforts on campus and beyond.

The instructor may utilize their existing campaigns textbook for this project and supplement with additional readings. Below are suggestions for further reading for both the instructor and students:

Commission on Public Relations Education. (2019). *CPRE Diversity & Inclusion Report*. Commission on Public Relations Education. Retrieved May 25, 2022, from

<https://www.commissionpred.org/commission-reports/cpre-diversity-inclusion-report/>

Creedon, P., & Al-Khaja, M. (2005). *Public relations and globalization: Building a case for cultural competency in public relations education*. *Public Relations Review*, 31(3), 344–354. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2005.05.021>

Luttrell, R. M., & Wallace, A. (2021, May 29). *Shifting the paradigm – improving student awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts through public relations campaigns*. *Journal of Public Relations Education*. Retrieved May 10, 2022, from <https://aejmc.us/jpre/2021/05/29/shifting-the-paradigm-improving-student-awareness-of-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-efforts-through-public-relations-campaigns/>

Mundy, D., Lewton, K., Hicks, A., & Neptune, T. (2018). Diversity. In *Fast forward: Foundations + future state. Educators + practitioners: The Commission on Public Relations Education 2017 Report on undergraduate education* (pp. 139-146). Commission on Public Relations Education. <http://www.commissionpred.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/report6-full.pdf>