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Teaching & Learning Project Eileen Jones/Clare Jenkins

Sept. 2008

Title of project: Evaluating and showcasing the creative portfolio work of students on the Public Relations & Practice Management module AIC 2501

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Rationale

It is well accepted within the University that we have some excellent examples of good practice of learning, teaching and assessment but that we do not celebrate or disseminate or share practice as much as we should. The assessment methods of this module are a prime example of this, and should be both shown off internally and externally and also properly evaluated and disseminated to other departments/Schools to further enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

As 50% of the assessment on a core module in both the Public Relations degree (MHM) and the Fashion & Media degree (ADA), the students have to run a PR Campaign for a town or area of a city, and create a portfolio of material for this including the following items: press releases, feature article, event management, a press pack for journalists. This assessment has had very positive outcomes:

- The students have produced some outstanding and very creative portfolios, which far exceeded expectations.
- The students have been really enthusiastic about undertaking this work, and as a result have put a great deal of time, care and effort into their portfolios.
- It embeds effective employability and transferable skills into the curriculum.
- It appeals to a wide variety of learning styles and needs.
- Similarly it allows students to develop and showcase their varying talents and is not just based on writing skills.
- The module therefore appeals to the non-traditional student cohort like international and mature students, so encourages and welcomes widening participation.

Student satisfaction

The research conducted by Eileen Jones and Clare Jenkins confirmed the students' general enthusiasm for this assignment. The following points were made by the students who were interviewed:

- Increased confidence in dealing with people and projects
- Made good contacts in the profession
- Opportunity to learn from mistakes
- Good career preparation
- Breakdown into component parts made the project more manageable than a long essay
- Practical application: "You can read as much as you want about the subject but you learn a lot more when you are out there doing it for yourself"

Room for improvement?

There were several suggestions made by the students and these are listed below, along with the author's initial response.

- *Work placements of at least two weeks would be beneficial.*

Students are encouraged to take every opportunity for work experience, but it would be unwieldy to build this as an essential requirement into the module. However, there is an increasing argument for adapting the PR course as a whole, to include an optional third year work placement, and this needs to be discussed by the course committee.

- *Formative group work would help preparation for this assignment.*

A good suggestion, and one that will be adopted this year.

- *There is an imbalance in the assessment marks.*

Yes, it has been acknowledged that the press pack is a far more substantial part of the project and marking has been adjusted accordingly

- *Prizes for the best ones*

Yes, why not?

- *The work could be displayed to show other students, and on open days.*

Indeed, it is. Part of the funding application was for a display case in the foyer of the JM building and I understand this is still pending. At the moment, items are stored in the Newsroom (JM2/03) and are exhibited regularly. A poster showing photographs, and outlining the rationale of the assessment, was produced for the T&L conference, and has also been supplied to the Creativity Café.

- *We need more time, and individual tuition, to help develop this project.*

True. The classes are large, and there is a wide range of abilities within each. Unfortunately we are all teaching extra hours this year, and facing extra administrative demands, so the opportunities for individual help have actually decreased. This is an important student satisfaction issue and needs to be addressed.

Conclusion

The report clarified and documented the student satisfaction with and enthusiasm for this piece of assessed work. It has now been incorporated in a very similar format into the second year media relations module, AIC2505, although it has proved time-consuming to explain the intricacies of the component parts to other staff, particularly PTHP who have not taught or assessed in this way before.

It is clear that the assessment addresses issues relating to different learning styles, and the difficulties sometimes posed by widening participation; many of the respondents were pleased to be assessed on something other than their writing skills. It also clearly encourages creativity, though I would argue that this is a concept which cannot be taught, only encouraged.

It would be a real tribute to the efforts made by the students if we could have a permanent display area for their work. The poster prepared for the T&L conference is now on display in the JM corridor.

A report on the project was published in Behind the Spin <http://www.behindthespin.com/news/punch-and-judy-approach-to-creative-media-relations>, June 2008.

Project evaluation:

Name of the Research Assistant evaluating the project: Clare Jenkins, Visiting Research Fellow in Oral History, Dept of Journalism & Media, email: c.jenkins@hud.ac.uk, phone 0114-263 0970

Evaluation Methods: Informal interviews with two student focus groups, an online questionnaire (see Appendix 2), assessment of outcomes (*examples of the creative portfolio work*). The aim: to evaluate the impact on students of this particular method of assessment.

Evaluation Stage 1: (by Clare Jenkins)

Initially, I conducted informal in-class interviews with two groups of 2nd Year students who were working on, and then handing in, their portfolio of work. I wanted to know how much they had enjoyed, and learnt from, the practical work: devising a PR campaign for their home town, making contacts with relevant people, writing business and events plans, budgeting, organising an event, writing Press releases, and preparing a Press pack for journalists that should reflect the town and the event, and demonstrate creativity of approach. I wished to know what lessons they had learnt from this approach, how valuable they thought it was in terms of applying some of the principles of PR to the practice of it, and what they had gained personally from the experience. I also wished to discover whether they had any suggestions for improvements to the module.

Individual Projects:

I began by asking them to describe their individual campaigns, and the towns, villages or areas they were intended to target. Among them were:

the Bronte birthplace of Thornton, Bradford;

a media/drama workshop at Salford Quays, prior to the BBC's forthcoming move to the area;

a vintage car rally to promote Coventry's transport links;

a children's treasure hunt at the Halifax Piece Hall;

a rock concert in Prestatyn;

a Punch and Judy show in Blackpool;

an amateur strongman event in Accrington;

a music festival in Felixstowe;

a haunted weekend in Darlington;

a carnival in Kos, Greece – the only one outside Britain (and the student's second home);

various events in Newark, Hexham, York, Sheffield, Holmfirth, Wakefield, Loughborough, Whitby and Huddersfield.

Some of the students in the first group I interviewed (halfway through the module) already had a clear idea of what their Press pack could contain (they had seen the previous year's efforts, which they had found useful). In the case of Kos, for example, the student had decided to construct a photo album, also incorporating cocktail recipes and flyers from bars, as a guide to the town. The student covering Blackpool, was planning a pack designed like a Punch and Judy kiosk, complete with red velvet curtain and puppets. A third, covering the haunted weekend, was thinking of designing (and did indeed design) a coffin to contain her souvenirs, brochures, objects and Press releases. This student also designed a website for the event.

Others – like the student covering the Bronte birthplace - were less clear. During the discussion that followed, with suggestions from her fellow students, she decided to create a box covered in pages from some of the sisters' novels, and incorporating a copy of the Jane Eyre novel and DVD, and raffle tickets for “A Date with Heathcliff”.

The Student Experience:

When asked to comment on the project overall, all bar one of the students said this project was a highlight of the course. The student experiencing reservations was still in the early stages of deciding what form her project would take, and admitted she felt more comfortable writing essays than thinking creatively, “out of the box” as another student put it. Among the comments expressed were:

“I prefer this to essays because you can become more involved in it... Normally I'll leave things to the last minute. I don't with this because I'm really enjoying it. And we've been encouraged to work further ahead because of the amount of work that needs to go in... I thought I knew a lot about my home town until I started researching it... It's made me think more outside the box”;

“I've loved doing it. It's good to do something more practical rather than something more academic. Because we've had to do a plan and a presentation, and think about budgeting, we've had to go and investigate things as though we're going to do it. We'd been doing a lot of essays, lectures and stuff, and this is about doing something practical and creative – like you'd be expected to do if you really were working for a PR company... It's been nice to plan things out, like an event. It's been good to work with our hands as well as our brains”;

“Before this, I'd have said I wasn't creative, that I'd never come up with an idea. But once you get the idea, you can really get stuck into it... You can spend hours on it and it doesn't feel like work... For hours we'd bounce ideas off each other. All 12 of us would be in here working, seeing each other's work and getting ideas off everybody else”;

“It's more fun than essay-writing – not easier, but more satisfying... And you have to do things off your own bat rather than in a group, so it's a more individual experience”;

“It's been good to see how different people interpreted the same brief. Everyone went for it. We wanted to do it. I'd spend hours on Ebay trying to find a treasure trove!”

“I did some work for a PR agency and they were doing something very similar to this, so it really helped that I was having this experience”;

“It’s been a really interesting project. I’m glad I’ve done it. It’s made us think and get out there rather than just reading books and writing essays. You have to use your initiative. And that’s what PR is all about.”

The Challenges:

Among the challenges both groups of students identified were:

“The event was the most difficult thing, because there was so much involved, so many things to think about. Like with a rock concert, having to do tickets, having to have meetings with councils and the local Press, and think about things like safety issues”;

“You have to get everything right, like ringing people up and getting the details right, and the prices”;

“As students, it’s miles harder to get people to speak to you when you ring them up. So it’s a bit daunting to begin with, but it develops your communication skills. You have to think on your feet. So it’s much more helpful for the world of real work. Every bit of the experience will help. You’re still having to do things you’d do for an essay, like research, but because you have to do events planning, a feature article, two Press releases, a business letter and a summary, it’s much more stretching. You have to make lots of contacts and then do an evaluation”;

“I wouldn’t have learnt as much about events planning if I hadn’t done this, because it’s quite hard and it’s made me realise how hard it is. You can’t learn that through an essay.”

Lessons Learned:

“Not to email because people don’t email back. You have to ring them”;

“To be persistent. You can email, but then you have to ring”;

“Give yourself plenty of time. So, after the lecture on business plans, you should write your business letter straightaway. The same with Press releases, etc”;

“To be more confident. To ring people up and go and see them.”

“I can now talk to people about funding far better than I ever thought I could.”

Suggestions for Improvement:

The students were asked if they had any recommendations for improving or developing the project:

“I’d have liked it to be a full 40-credit module”;

“Yes, you could base the entire module around this one thing, over a whole term. Rather than having the build-up exercises at first”;

“It could have had more elements. So it could have started off as a small PR campaign for something, then it could have moved on to the event. Everything could have been based around this”;

“When I started the course, I thought there would be more things like this. I thought it would be more vocational. But it was more theory. So this has given us something to express ourselves with – not just another essay. That, and doing the practical project this year and doing a PR campaign have been the best things for me. You learn so much from the practical stuff”;

“Yes, there were times when I thought this course was Media with a bit of PR. When it should have been the other way round.”

Practical Application:

The work they had done had also helped them to focus on what particular aspects of PR and the media they enjoyed. As a result of the different aspects of the work, some of the students now felt they definitely wanted to work in events management (“I’ve realised that events are my strong point. I can’t really write feature articles, so before I started doing this I was thinking that I was on the wrong course”)

Evaluation Stage 2:

Once the students had submitted their Press packs, I visited the room where they were displayed to view the results. They varied from the highly creative (the Blackpool Punch and Judy show, for instance, complete with puppets; a sheep glove puppet containing goodies, information and Press releases, promoting a puppet workshop in Penrith) to the workaday (the ones containing only Tourist Board leaflets and shop-bought items, with no imagination having gone into the process).

Some of those that had risen to the challenge were:

a highly decorated pot containing be-tassled Press releases, Diwali lamps and Chinese chopsticks, representing Bradford’s cultural diversity;

a handmade Haribo rocket firework containing a CD of images of Pontefract, together with old postcards, leaflets and souvenirs;

a shoebox cleverly turned into a radio, with thimbles for dials;

a giant Accrington pie (specially made by the town’s bakers);

a beach hut containing a stick of rock and a Press release “scrolled up in the style of a message from the sea”;

a picnic basket complete with plastic plates and cups, and a flask containing the Press releases;

a coffin-shaped box.

There were also boxes turned into radios and record players; a huge ‘stick of Blackpool rock’; a couple of boxes with football pitches on top of them; a couple of ‘treasure chests’; a hot air balloon; a rugby ball-shaped container; even a ‘tree’ with parcels hanging off the branches.

At the more functional end were a few unadorned shoeboxes, and some shop-bought gift bags containing Press releases and leaflets.

Overall, the work was encouragingly varied in terms of execution of the task, with some (the majority) students obviously having engaged more with the process, and the chances and challenges it offered, than others.

Evaluation Stage 3:

I followed this up with an online questionnaire, which was emailed to 45 students, currently in their second year, of whom 15 replied. It was also sent to the previous year's batch of students, only three of whom replied (because it was sent out in April and May, these students would have been finishing off their final year assignments and projects) .

Responses:

Q: How well was the project explained to you?

13 students felt the project was Very Well explained to them, while 5 thought it was Quite Well explained, but they would have benefited from further explanation. None ticked the Not Very Well explained box.

Q: How enjoyable was the project?

14 students found it Very enjoyable, while 4 found it Quite enjoyable.

The subsidiary question was: ***What did you enjoy about it?***

Among the responses were:

“The part I enjoyed most was finding out how much everything will cost and planning my event and putting together the Press pack”;

“Learning and researching more about the area that I lived in. I really enjoyed the creative side of the project and the event planning”;

“I loved the practical side of the project. I really enjoyed having to contact people via phone and email to get relevant information. This project actually made me want to do a PR work placement this year. It also allowed me to be creative not just with my writing. I was able to be arty as well, which I really like”;

“I enjoyed this project as it was very hands-on and practical. It gave me a sense of the sort of projects that I might get when working. The project also enabled me to put all my teachings from my two years so far into practice and, with the knowledge that we have a practical case study in the final year, it also allowed a sense of a test run”;

“I found the challenge of talking to people from the town very exciting. I have become a lot more confident because of it, and feel that I understand the concept of public relations a lot better now”;

“I enjoyed making up the Press pack as I enjoy practical work. However I felt that the pack could have been better if I had more money to spend on it”;

“I ended up with a solo project and found that I hated working alone. Another student had asked to work with me but was persuaded by tutor to remain with his original group. I loved meeting the people and the challenge but overall it was too big a project for one person, and I am not sure if that was appreciated in terms of work volume, the end project and the difficulties keeping in contact with the client and tutors. Not living in Huddersfield meant having to travel in the hope of a meeting for a rushed 10 to 20 min”;

“I really enjoyed putting together my event and actually going through the process of organising it as if it was really happening. I have since decided that event planning and management is something that I would like to pursue when I leave university”;

“I enjoyed researching in and about my hometown. I also enjoyed the flexibility and diversity of the project i.e. everyone came up with something totally different and you could produce written and visual work”;

“Being able to relate the project to your own life/experience, not just a generic project. Creative, not just writing up a press release, being able to produce an actual press pack that has relevance to the particular event etc”;

“I enjoyed the creative side of the project rather than simply writing essays. It was also fun to contact lots of interesting people and look at the city I live in from a different perspective”;

“I enjoyed the practical approach, the fact that we made press packs, had to go out and get interviews and were writing about real things in our press releases. I also enjoyed the event plan as it gave us an opportunity to put a practical spin on our PR work”;

“I was able to speak to lots of people about their enthusiasm for Huddersfield. It made me approach people and present myself in a professional manner and operate as a PR Professional”;

“I really enjoyed the project because there were lots of areas you could get stuck into. It allowed you to make contacts, as well as plan an event, get practice in press releases and learn how to write a professional business letter. Making the press packs was really good fun. It was so much more fun than an essay”;

“Getting creative, it was fun to think how to do the press pack and to be able to think out of the box to create something unique and different”;

“I like being creative and I like business style writing so it was a perfect project for me. I liked the idea of making up my own company as it really involves you in the project as you can really make it your own”;

“It was more interactive, you got to talk with people and you could be as creative as you wanted to be and it also gave a taste of working on *[a]* live project”;

“I enjoyed putting the press pack together and finding information and freebies to include. This module wasn't my strongest area so I did have trouble writing about the event and justifying why it was a good idea”.

From these answers, it can be seen that the vast majority of the students responded positively and enthusiastically to something that was much more creative and practical than their other, more academic, work. It was something that seemed more relevant to their future than writing another

essay. In the main, they felt the task, and the way they tackled it, improved their confidence, their communication skills (both written and verbal, by email, letter, telephone and in person), their understanding of the world of Public Relations and its relationship with journalists, their awareness of the complexities of events management and of the importance of careful budgeting and well thought through business plans.

In addition, they enjoyed the opportunity it gave them to discuss creative ideas with their fellow students, and to appreciate their home town and its inhabitants.

Where reservations were expressed, these were about financial constraints (one student), the challenge of working alone (one student), and a feeling that the workload involved was too great for one person (again, one student).

Q: Would you have preferred to write a dissertation instead of doing the Practical Project?

All but one answered No, with two adding “Definitely Not”, and one ticking the Don’t Know box.

Q: What was the most challenging part of the project – and why?

Responses:

“Deciding on something interesting to produce, something that will attract publicity but still has relevance to the actual town being covered. Then producing it so that it looks professional”;

“I think the most challenging part of the project was thinking of all the factors that are needed to organise an event. There are so many different aspects to think of and sometimes it is difficult to pick up the phone and ask organisations/ companies etc for help”;

“Having people getting back in touch with you I have found that emailing definitely does not work as if they do bother to get back to you its always that little bit too late and that it was much better to arrange a meeting or just go and see them and persistence is definitely the key The other challenging part of the assignment was getting hold of a wooden treasure chest and the event plan as I had never done anything like this before”;

“The calling people because some people were rude, the easy part was putting together the press pack”;

“... working alone and having to figure out how to use systems ie Quark, that I have never used before. Also the internal bureaucracy to bring about the event was difficult and getting full and explanative answers never seemed forthcoming.”;

“I found getting in touch with people difficult. I don’t think people really want to speak to students”;

“At first thinking of an original and captivating event was difficult, and creating a realistic costing plan (as calling people to get quotes often involved drawn out explanations of what I was doing and what I needed to know and often ended with people saying that without a booking and other details they couldn’t help) I also found making my press pack difficult as I am not always the best at creating the things I think of”;

“Interviewing was one of the biggest challenges but when you get your first out of the way it’s great. Writing press release nerved [*sic*] me as well as I’m not the most confident writer”;

“Personally, I found the writing of the feature article the most challenging as they are the one thing I do not like to write. The rest of the project was also challenging but in an enjoyable way”;

“I found the hardest part of the project the feature article. This is as a result of having to find something new and fresh to talk about, and Tatsfield isn’t the most exciting of places, very little happens. But thankfully a development was confirmed around the time I was handing in the project so the extension we had enabled me to write a better article with more exciting ‘news’. But having to wait until the last minute was a bit daunting but it enabled me to write a better more interesting article with a better angle”;

“At first I would say that cold calling as it’s one of my pet hate but the more I did it the more I enjoyed it as I do generally love speaking to people so I found it very easy picking up the phone and having a chat. I also managed to get some free products sent over to help me with my project which I was really grateful for”;

“Doing the event plan, as I didn’t know where to start really, would have been better if we worked on these in class”;

“I found it quite difficult to get started on the press releases, but once I had, they became quite enjoyable. I also found it quite daunting to phone people to ask if they would participate in my event and take the time to be interviewed, but it got easier the more I did it. I also found it daunting having to go and speak to the police about the organisation of my event – although that was quite fun too!”

“I think it was all quite challenging as it was all completely new to me, it wasn't hard you just needed the know how and the enthusiasm to start the project in good time. I think time management is an issue for most students, it was good that we were given an extension as it made our work a lot better overall”;

“The creation of the event. I never realised how much organisation went into events!”

“Providing realistic budgets as some people didn’t respond”;

“Thinking of the whole idea was the hardest part for me. Obviously I know Didsbury as I live there but as the village have [*sic*] a lot going on anyway it was quite hard to think of a new idea. As I mentioned before as this module was a weak area for me the whole project was challenging”.

From this, it can be seen that, although students see the project as enjoyable and ‘fun’, it is not without its considerable challenges: most significantly, the task of cold calling, the need for persistence, the development of problem-solving strategies. Most students responded well to these challenges and learnt much, about themselves and about the world of PR, along the way.

However, it should be added that the vast majority of students indicated throughout the interviews and questionnaire responses that they felt they had had considerable support and encouragement from their tutor.

Q: What skills do you feel you have acquired through doing the project, which could come in useful in your future career?

As might be expected from the responses so far, the main skills highlighted were:

- Increased confidence in dealing with people, particularly by phone and face to face: “I don’t fear ringing up someone who I don’t know now. I also know that contacting Manchester city council is very hard work!”
- The importance of contacts: “I now know how to approach people and it has given me the confidence to...I have learnt how to gain and keep contacts and create and organise an event. I have also learnt how and where to give an interview”; “Creating media lists”;
- Interviewing skills: “My interviewing skills are a lot better and I got some PR work for someone who owns a shop in Huddersfield to do over the summer. I really see PR as a career option for me now”;
- An increased ability to think creatively;
- The purpose and assembly of Press packs;
- The writing of Press releases: “The ability to make something that can be quite average really jump off the page”; “Focusing on positive aspects. I found a lot of bad press on the town while trying to do my project”;
- How to put together an event plan;
- How to budget;
- Persistence: “To be persistent so that people do not judge you when they hear that you are a student and actually take you seriously as I have found that when you first tell people that you are a student they tend to say sorry but we don’t talk to students”;
- Time management.

Three students were more cautious in their responses here:

“I wouldn’t say this project taught me anything new. It was a chance to show all the things we had learnt in two years on the course. These include writing press and news releases, compiling and contacting press lists and thinking creatively. Event planning I guess was new but I wouldn’t saw it was strong enough to take into industry and use in my career as there will be people who have specialised in this area for three years plus and self-taught piece of this project is not enough to compete with that”;

“I don’t so much feel that I’ve learnt new skills from this project as I have put my learnt skills into practice. Although these skills included time management, communication skills, creative ideas and the importance of media relations”;

“As a mature student who has had several career changes I am used to challenges which this was but I have learnt that I cannot work alone or from home without any contact with others for such long periods”.

Q: How much has the project helped you to understand the world of Public Relations?

Opinion here was equally divided between “It’s helped a lot” and “Quite a lot”.

Q: Have you made useful contacts as a result of the project?

Three students ticked A Lot, six students ticked A Few, five students ticked Not Many, four ticked None. It could be that the results show the students who have more initiative and understanding of the need for a network of useful contacts than others who perhaps did not stretch themselves sufficiently.

Q: How satisfied are you with what you have achieved – in terms of contacts made, skills acquired, confidence, the imaginative scope of the Press Pack, etc?

Again, opinion was fairly evenly divided between Very Satisfied and Quite Satisfied. One student expressed themselves Not Satisfied, adding: “I believe I struggled quite a lot in this module. I think I am a practical person who learns a lot more from visuals which is probably the reason that I had fun putting together the press pack”.

When asked to explain why they had ticked a particular box, the responses included:

“Not many contacts made throughout the process. Perhaps needed more time overall to work on our individual projects with tutor, rather than group activities, regular tutorials discussing the progression of each individual project”;

“I am really proud of my project as I got my best ever mark at Uni for it”;

“I felt I could have used some of the contacts more, and although I have changed a lot in what I know and can do, I feel I could have done more. I felt I could have pushed my abilities and skills more”;

“When I saw people’s [work] from the year before I thought I would never be able to do it but I did. I’m not very confident so I was pleased with myself getting in contact with everyone”;

“I am very satisfied with what I have achieved and I have enjoyed doing this project a lot. It has enabled me to show what I am capable of as I am better at practical work than doing written work such as essays. It has also helped me to understand a lot more about what goes into public relations. I have met new people from doing this project; some of which I am still in regular contact with and it has allowed me to show my creativity. I feel more capable of working within public relations”;

“I would have liked to have learnt more on event plans and event planning but really enjoyed the project”;

“I felt very satisfied with my project, I really enjoyed doing it which made me work really hard on it. As I said earlier the project made me want to do my work placement in PR. I am currently on the work placement in London and I can relate what I am doing now back that project, so I would say it definitely prepared me for the job”;

“I also feel more confident in my choice for work after university. As a result of doing this project, which is very similar to what I will be doing after university, I now know that Public Relations is the correct choice for me”;

“My confidence when it comes to speaking to people I have never spoken to before has gone through the roof. I feel like I can now be more imaginative on my approach to PR because in my first year my Press Releases were done on Word but for this project I used Adobe and was able to design a logo and make my work look very professional”;

“I am satisfied with the confidence I have got from this project in terms of writing press releases and event plans, however I did not make any new contacts which would have been useful”;

“I have made and introduced others to some very influential people in the PR industry. I have learnt from my mistakes...”

“I feel that I put a lot of work in to the project because I enjoyed what I was doing it had written and practical mixed and was my favourite project I did out of the whole year in every subject. It also taught me more about PR and what is involved in it more as you can read as much as you want about the subject but I feel that you learn more when you are actually out there doing it for yourself”;

“The project helped me to understand PR because it covered a wide spectrum of the realities of PR practices. It opened my eyes as to what a PR actually does, and how they should go about things.”

Q: Is there any way the teaching of the Practical Project could be improved in future years?

There was much praise among the replies for the tutor (Eileen Jones), her enthusiasm, teaching methods, and the support she gave the students, who also in the main expressed satisfaction with the way the module was taught. One student wrote: “the project was explained clearly both in seminars and in the handbook and Eileen was always available to talk things through with us and help us where needed”, and this was echoed in many of the replies.

Where suggestions were made, they included:

“More on event planning. Maybe complete a formative project on it before doing this one”;

“Maybe one on one progression meetings”;

“I think every student should get the opportunity to do at least a 2 week placement in some kind of PR company as until you have work first hand (like with anything) it is hard to understand fully what PR entails”;

“Possibly a small group event where you have to do all the aspects of the practical project as well as actually doing the event for real”;

“Yes. Far greater contact with tutor at set times on a personal basis. The teaching reduced for the course (3rd yr) to a mere 4 hours per week and finally to two. Another two hour module proved unsatisfactory. Due to this limited teaching time I think for value for money (fees) and help with project, a specific tutorial time should be set aside for the group where that time is allocated purely to the final year project students” [*This, from a student now in her final year*];

“Regular individual tutorials will boost grades and general understanding of PR”;

“Prizes for the best ones ;-)”

From these replies, it can be seen that individual tutorials were desired by some of the students, together with a ‘dry run’ and a possible work placement experience.

Q: Finally, what is your overall view of the Practical Project?

“I think the practical project is one of the best parts about the module and of the second year as a whole. It really enables learning and aids the understanding of why we’ve been taught what we have and how to put our teachings in to practice”;

“I thought it was a fun project which I enjoyed and wish the other parts of the course were the same”;

“It was a nice warm up for doing a Major Project in final year as it gives you chance to work on lots of different things at once”;

“I think it is really helpful and I am glad we did it. I think we were given enough time to do it all, and Eileen was a big help with everything, including inspiration!”

“A great way to learn and understand what event management involves in a way that couldn’t really be taught through writing an essay or lectures”;

“I think I could have done better maybe if we had more time on the module, I think maybe I found it hard to juggle all my modules at once. If I had spent more time on this I would have really enjoyed the project”;

“I found this practical project not only enjoyable, but also essential for my learning. It has helped me to fully understand the business and have a go at it for myself”;

“I think everyone really enjoyed it and have come up with some fantastic designs. My written work is not as good as my press pack and I would have liked more help with this”;

“It was very successful in making me understand what PR is all about first hand on a practical level. Eileen was brilliant!”

“My overall view is that the practical project is a very worthwhile assignment. It prepares you for certain things which may crop up in your future careers, such as event planning, and builds your confidence by making you ring people and interview people. It is the most enjoyable assignment I have done so far”;

“I feel that the practical project was a very positive learning experience that encouraged me to think about my work in more of a creative way. I also think the break down of it (having to do press releases and event plans) helps to make the work seem manageable and also fresh as you are not just focusing on one aspect of a topic for 9000 words”;

“I enjoyed the project and preferred doing it to an essay”;

“I really enjoyed it, it taught me new skills and gave me more confidence to interview and talk to people”;

“I really enjoyed the project and it was definitely my favourite piece of work over the three years at Uni. I felt we were using the PR skills we had been taught in the best way rather than always writing essays about it”;

“Fun compared to just writing essays or assignments, creative and imaginative whilst being useful at the same time. Perhaps more individual guidance needed, though”;

“I really enjoyed doing it and I think the timescale was just right. It was a nice piece to do as it is creative and academic”;

“For me it was the best project of the year. I much prefer it to an essay and it gave me a real insight to what being in PR could actually be like. It made me understand and realise the effort that has to go into a PR campaign and I would be happy to take my project along to any interview and show them what I’m capable of”;

“It gives students the opportunity to learn, put into practice learning and develop new skills. However, I am not sure if each project is balanced in terms of each group and what their project involves in comparative terms between the groups. I agree that any work done could be displayed as a mark of achievement to the students and particularly to the university. It would also provide the media department and in particular PR with credibility and standing, particularly when there are open days, visitors and new students, allowing them to see end results of a three year course, a sense of pride overall”.

Eileen Jones: Initial response

This is a fascinating and detailed report. It raises several questions about future delivery of the module, and its assessment. Clearly it is not possible to create a 40 credit second year module. But I do think that there may be a case for giving greater weighting to this particular assessment, perhaps 75% rather than 50%, cutting out the essay, and retaining the presentation as the remaining 25%. I note comments from students about the need for further, individual, tuition, and agree heartily! If only we lived in an ideal world!

Those students who maintained that there had been insufficient teaching or delivery on particular aspects of the project must be the ones who missed those particular classes. In a 24-week teaching year, it is simply not possible to duplicate seminars for those who are absent, and full attendance will guarantee adequate instruction in all aspects of the practice required.

Appendix 1:**Comment from Andy Green of Green Communications, the university's visiting research fellow in PR:**

Faced with a challenge of capturing interest and creating engagement, the students have shown outstanding originality, verve, playfulness and commitment in their assignments.

The outstanding quality is that there is no repetition among the entries. There is no 'me-too-ness' among the work. Students have gone down many different creative routes and explored different themes demonstrating their creativity, imagination and understanding of the brief.

Well done on all that you are achieving.

Appendix 2:

Student questionnaire:

Public Relations Practice & Management

Second Year Practical Project: PR Campaign and Press Pack

Evaluation Questionnaire

Q1: Briefly describe your Practical Project – the town or area it covered, and what you produced.....

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Q2: How well was the project explained to you (*tick one box*)?

Very well Quite well – I could have done with further explanation Not very well – I didn't really understand what I was supposed to do

Q3: How enjoyable was the project (*tick one box*)?

Very enjoyable Quite enjoyable I didn't enjoy it

If Very Enjoyable, what did you enjoy about it?

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If Quite Enjoyable, what did you enjoy about it – and what could have improved it?

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If you didn't enjoy it, why not?

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Q4: Would you have preferred to write a dissertation instead of doing the Practical Project?

Yes No Don't Know

If you have said Yes, would you like this to be an option in future?

Yes No Why not?

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Q5: What was the most challenging part of the project – and why? *(This might be thinking up the Press Campaign itself, cold-calling people, arranging meetings, compiling questionnaires, writing Press Releases or business letters, planning an event, thinking of an imaginative Press Pack, etc)*

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Q6: What skills do you feel you have acquired through doing the project, which could come in useful in your future career?

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Q7: How much has the project helped you to understand the world of Public Relations?

It's helped a lot Quite a lot Not very much
Not at all – I still don't understand what a PR does

Q8: Have you made useful contacts as a result of the project?

Yes, a lot A few Not many None

Q9: How satisfied are you with what you have achieved – in terms of contacts made, skills acquired, confidence, the imaginative scope of the Press Pack, etc?

Very satisfied Quite satisfied Not satisfied

Take a few moments to explain why you have ticked one of the above boxes

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Q10: Is there any way the teaching of the Practical Project could be improved in future years?

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Q11: Finally, what is your overall view of the Practical Project?

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Thank you for taking the trouble to answer this Questionnaire. If you want anything explained further, don't hesitate to contact me, Clare Jenkins, on c.jenkins@hud.ac.uk or on 0114-263 0970.