1992

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Just What Can You Do With a Degree in Public Relations?

Goal: To help students identify jobs that utilize communication skills.

Students enrolled in communication programs often don’t know how to market knowledge and skills acquired in class. This is particularly true in public relations. Public relations majors are well suited for positions that rely heavily on writing and speaking skills as well as the ability to deal with customers, suppliers, and others. Yet, graduates frequently overlook entry level openings because these jobs are not labeled "public relations" positions.

I use the employment classified ads to increase student awareness of the variety of jobs open to public relations majors. I bring several copies of the Sunday classified section of a major metropolitan daily to class and assign groups of students to circle job listings that could be filled by public relations graduates. Participants generally find few positions listed under "Public Relations" but locate a number of potential jobs under such headings as "Activist," "Advertising," "Customer Service," "Editor," "Management," "Marketing," and "Sales." (Since reading every ad can be time consuming, une portion of the classifieds [A-H, I-M] can be assigned to each group to stay within time limits.) After the groups have listed and explained their job choices, we discuss the types of skills public relations majors develop during their coursework.

In addition to helping students identify public relations employment opportunities, this exercise demonstrates how to use the classified ads when looking for a job. Employment expert Richard Bolles (What Color Is Your Parachute? Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1989) suggests that job seekers start with the letter A and read every ad under every letter of the alphabet since the same jobs may be listed in several different sections of the classifieds. By searching for jobs that require public relations skills, students learn the importance of a thorough job listing search. A customer service job, for example, might be listed under "Banking," "Insurance," or "Retail." A job seeker looking under only one of these headings would miss out on a number of potential entry-level positions.

This practical exercise helps students learn more about the job market and their own marketability.

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