

The Leading Edge of PR Education How Brigham Young University prepares students to be employable after graduation

Public relations has evolved beyond politically correct messaging. At Brigham Young University students are learning how to turn data into strategy that yields results. Perceptions and opinions are formed within moments. Whether they are good or bad depends on how well an organization can communicate with its publics. There is, however, more to the process than just framing perceptions. What is even more important in our data driven world is developing strategies based on research and data. The profession of public relations is a critical part of every organization's leadership and as such requires a significant amount of experience and professionalism from day one. At Brigham Young University, the public relations program is designed to give students the practical skills and experience they need to be employable in today's PR environment as soon as they graduate.

As the communications industry continues to evolve rapidly there are a few things that set the program at BYU apart from others. In a data driven world where employers want not only to know what is going on but why it's going on there is one skill that immediately sets potential employees apart from their peers. This is research experience. Research experience meets the demands of our current fast paced and data driven communications industry and students at BYU get that experience from their first semester in the program.

At Brigham Young University, the program is designed with one goal in mind: preparing students to succeed immediately after graduation. As you walk through the Brimhall building at BYU it is clear to see that this is not your average public relations program. When you walk into first semester classrooms you will see students learn how to conduct research both through interpersonal skills and social media monitoring. Students in second semester classrooms are learning the skills they need to build relationships with the world of news and reporting such as press releases and reporter pitches. Students are creating media portfolios full of projects and documents that demonstrate their skills in foundational PR practices. These foundational classes set the tone for the rest of the program, eventually ending with capstone classes that pair students with clients to conduct a research project. Combined with the program's internship requirement it's clear to see that the PR program at BYU is focused on producing high quality employees that do more than just produce good PR products. PR students at BYU learn how to conduct research and then direct strategy based on their findings. BYU is more than just classes and classrooms; it is a fully functioning PR research agency that is developing future employees.

According to BYU professor Dr. Michael Burke "All students are heavily involved in research, everyone has to learn how to do it whether you want to or not". Dr. Burke went on to talk about how in the PR industry right now companies are looking for students that can conduct senior level strategic thinking or in other words students that can take findings from research and turn them into strategic actions. He also said that "The students that get the most out of the program understand how these two things connect, moving from research findings to strategies, and those are the students who will be the most prepared for where the workforce is going."

As the industries surrounding PR continue to evolve, the ability to turn research into insights and insights into strategy sets students apart for potential employers. At Brigham Young University this learning outcome is not only encouraged, it is the standard from day one. Students at BYU aren't just learning how to create visuals and products, they're learning how to analyze audiences through research driven public relations.