



Public relations supervisors and Millennial entry-level practitioners rate entry-level job skills and professional characteristics



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ABSTRACT

An online survey was administered to 109 Millennial entry-level public relations employees and 56 supervisors regarding entry-level job skills and professional characteristics. The Millennial entry-level workers rated their job performance in the above average and average ranges. The supervisors rated six of the eight job skills and all 16 professional characteristics as significantly poorer than the Millennials rated themselves. The job skills of computer and social media skills were the only two items that did not generate a significant difference. The researcher outlines ways in which faculty, students, employers, and Millennial-aged employees can build learning communities that will help undergraduate students and Millennial workers develop proficient job performance and keep faculty up-to-date regarding current industry trends.

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1. Introduction

Millennials, the generation born between approximately 1982 and 2002 (Curtin, Gallicano, & Matthews, 2011; Hollon, 2008; Novelli, 2008; Schwalbe, 2009), are the latest and most quickly growing public of college graduates to enter the workforce (Gallicano, Curtin, & Matthews, 2012). According to the Young Entrepreneur Council, Millennials will comprise 46% of U.S. workers by 2020 (Faw, 2012). Positive attributes associated with Millennial employees include their ambition toward success, their willingness to be active members of the company team, and their efficacy with technology (Gallicano et al., 2012; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Novelli, 2008; Pompper, 2011; Schwalbe, 2009). “Their managers, however, consistently express exasperation over Millennials’ sense of entitlement, difficulty in taking direction, self-indulgence, greed, short-sightedness, poor skills, and lack of work ethic” (Curtin et al., 2011, p. 1). Some employers “contend that Millennials’ characteristics may complicate, and potentially disrupt, workplace interactions with members of other generations, thus negatively affecting coworkers and organizational processes” (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p. 226).

Few empirical studies have examined Millennial public relations practitioners’ job performance. This study attempts to begin filling that gap. The researcher surveyed public relations industry practitioners, including Millennial-aged entry-level public relations employees who have worked full time in the industry two or fewer years and employers who supervise entry-level Millennial-aged public relations workers. The study sought to determine how each group would rate Millennial entry-level job skills and professional characteristics. The Millennials and supervisors were asked to offer suggestions of

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how public relations educators can better teach today's students the job skills and professional characteristics they will need upon entering the industry after graduation.

2. Review of literature

At times, educators and industry professionals agree on the knowledge and skills undergraduate students should be taught to become effective entry-level practitioners, as the Commission on Public Relations Education reported in 2006 ([The Professional Bond, 2006](#)). At other times, employers complain that recent college graduates do not possess the knowledge and skills necessary to hit the ground running as effective professionals and they lack a sense of how the “real world” operates ([Brown & Fall, 2005](#); [Curtin et al., 2011](#); [Gallicano et al., 2012](#); [McDonough, Rodriguez, & Prior-Miller, 2009](#); [Swanson, 2007](#)). Educators are familiar with the pressure to teach students the most relevant knowledge and skills to be industry-ready; “yet it always seems that the college curriculum is ‘behind the curve’ in terms of what the industry is looking for” ([Swanson, 2007](#), p. 15). Practitioners believe the public relations curriculum is out of touch with today's industry, and educators are not teaching students the skills they will need to advance in the modern communications world ([Todd, 2009](#)).

2.1. Communications job skills

2.1.1. Writing skills

Public relations researchers have documented the importance of undergraduate students learning persuasive and technically correct writing skills, as well as the lack of effective writing abilities entry-level practitioners display. [Hines and Basso \(2008\)](#) found that “an alarming number of communication professionals report that entry-level employees possess poor writing skills and even poorer editing skills” (p. 293). [Pompper \(2011\)](#) interviewed public relations adjuncts who expressed exasperation when evaluating Millennial students' poor writing skills. [Gower and Reber \(2006\)](#) found that public relations majors indicated they were strong writers.

[Hardin and Pompper \(2004\)](#) surmised that new public relations hires must be excellent writers to be marketable in the industry. [Cole, Hembroff, and Corner \(2009\)](#) concluded that almost half of the public relations professionals surveyed admitted that they have lowered their expectations regarding entry-level practitioners' writing abilities. [Wise \(2005\)](#) learned that public relations employers rated entry-level practitioners' writing skills as “bad” or “poor” (p. 38). [Brown and Fall \(2005\)](#) found that public relations internship supervisors requested that students learn more proficient writing skills, and [Berger, Reber, and Heyman \(2005\)](#) reported that public relations employers advised recent graduates to cultivate strong writing skills. [Todd \(2009\)](#) suggested that educators work closely with industry professionals to develop writing assignments and assessment measures that will help students learn how to write clear messages targeted toward publics using current technology.

2.1.2. Technology skills

Public relations educators and practitioners agree that Internet technology and social media are changing the way businesses correspond with publics, and curricula should adapt to reflect these changes. The 2006 Report of the Commission on Public Relations Education urged educators to teach undergraduate students how to be “proficient in the use of the most recent communication technology, but also to understand and appreciate the societal ramifications of its use” ([The Professional Bond, 2006](#), p. 6). Incorporating digital technology in the classroom is even more relevant today because Millennial college students are “digital natives” who have grown up using new technologies ([Gallicano et al., 2012](#); [Pompper, 2011](#)).

[Wright and Hinson \(2008\)](#) found that 94% of public relations professionals surveyed reported that public relations education should teach students blogging and other social media skills. [Moody \(2010\)](#) concluded that students who are taught to blog and communicate effectively on Facebook will have a stronger chance of landing industry positions after graduation. This researcher surmised that many educators have not modified their courses to encompass new technology skills used in the industry. [Swanson \(2007\)](#) added, “It's a struggle for faculty to be ‘up’ on the latest technology, because we typically don't get release time to learn new software applications or figure out how to integrate them into existing classes” (p. 20). [Weisgerber \(2009\)](#) claimed it is the duty of educators to teach students how to be proficient in the latest social media technology even though the landscape is quickly transforming and faculty may be forced to teach outside their comfort zones. [Royal \(2005\)](#) added that “teaching without a focus on integration, judgment, and perspective in the new media environment will ultimately fail students who suddenly find their skills outdated, outmoded, or out of sync with the real world” (p. 412).

[Hornaman and Sriramesh \(2003\)](#) indicated that 73% of educators and 77% of practitioners found public relations graduates to be prepared regarding new technology use. [Gower and Reber \(2006\)](#) revealed that public relations majors admitted not feeling prepared for employment concerning new technologies.

2.1.3. Other communications job skills

Communications educators and professionals have also noted that entry-level employees should possess effective oral communication skills ([Brown & Fall, 2005](#); [Hornaman & Sriramesh, 2003](#)), researching skills ([The Professional Bond, 2006](#)), and a knowledge of how the business world operates ([Berger et al., 2005](#); [Bush, 2009](#); [McDonough et al., 2009](#)).

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