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Slug: Public relations and ethics

Headline: Public relations educators and professionals discuss how public relations and advertising can work towards furthering ethics, diversity and equity.

Interviewed Sources:

Lee Ann Kahlor, associate professor at the University of Texas at Austin. Interviewed over phone

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- Date(s) contacted: via email 2/26/21, via email again 3/3/21, interviewed 3/5/21

Lisa Dobias, associate professor and director of TexasMedia sequence at the University of Texas at Austin. Interviewed during the live event.

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- Date(s) contacted: asked question during the live event 02/3/21

These sources represent a diversity of voices for the article because it includes a professor who teaches about ethics in public relations and spoke at the event and a professor who moderated the event.

Sources attempted to contact via email but never responded: Clarissa Ruiz, PRSSA president and Meme Drumwright, associate professor

Background Sources / Websites Used:

Tulane University

<https://sopa.tulane.edu/blog/ethics-public-relations>

(used for quote about public relations ethics)

CVS Website

<https://www.cvs.com/content/beauty-mark>

(used to link to link their “Beauty Unaltered” campaign)

AUSTIN, Texas — The next generation of Public relations professionals need to confront the problems in the industry, seven experts said during a University of Texas at Austin panel on Feb. 3, 2021 (when discussing why PR professionals often get a bad reputation).

“PR professionals are seen as supporters of the network of complicity and using their expertise with communication to perpetuate the myths that protect the perpetrators,” said Meme Drumwright, a professor of advertising and public relations at UT-Austin.

Seven other speakers joined Drumwright at the online seminar, which was part of the multi-part lecture series “Ethical Theory X Practice Discussion Series on Public Relations, Political Crisis and leading with Principle.” Speakers spanned a wide range of industry jobs, such as researching professors and public relations professionals.

Professors made it clear that teaching the next generation of public relations practitioners meant teaching students about the importance of promoting equity and diversity in the workplace.

Public relations professionals can find themselves in a position where they feel the need to hide problems to avoid backlash, Drumwright said. She resolves this issue by urging professionals to effectively communicate and be heard.

“Public relations professionals can be forces for positive change in their organizations,” Drumwright said. “However to do so they have to be skillful communicators, they have to be very effective networkers and they have to be artful organizational politicians.”

[According to Tulane University School of Professional Advancement](#), “Ethical public relations call for upholding transparency when dealing with any information, sensitive or not. Blurring fact and fiction can cause a serious rift in credibility and tarnish a firm’s reputation.”

Not all speakers had research to present. Instead, Lisa Dobias, professor and director of TexasMedia sequence at UT-Austin spoke about teaching and companies she thought were leading the industry with exemplary ethics and transparent public relations.

“I am incredibly inspired,” Dobias praised when talking about CVS and their [“Beauty Unaltered”](#) campaign. A campaign where they promise to not sell any products that use alteration as part of their advertising.

While Dobias is hopeful about the future and thinks public relations is moving in the right direction, she sees the importance of promoting ethics and diversity. She teaches her classes to remember there is a, “multi-faceted individual behind every customer.”

“I have these many different portions of my life that I bring out at different times of the day,” Dobias said, “It’s really about thinking about me as a teacher, as a mom...as a supervisor or colleague.”

Lee Ann Kahlor, associate professor at UT-Austin who served as moderator for the seminar thinks that equity diversity and inclusion are extremely important especially in a classroom.

“I try very hard to choose businesses or topics in my class that push students to think about equity, diversity and inclusion,” Kahlor said. “We are applying them in ways that also push us to explore how businesses can become more equitable in the services they provide.”

Kahlor understands that creating a change in the PR industry starts in education and hopes that her students take her lessons past graduation and into the professional world. Students should take time to reflect on what values they believe in and use that as a trajectory for their career Kahlor said. “Seek out internships and jobs that align with those values and views.”

With a new generation of public relations professionals at its helm, the future of the industry is bright. Drumwright concurs, “public relations professionals can and do play the role of organizational conscience. They can be the people who lead in transactional and transformational networks.”

Dobias agrees.

“I think the industry is catching up with the need to really understand people,” especially, “with transparency.”