

Public Relations in Portugal

Mapping the Status of Higher Education

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Introduction

The present study fills the void in research on Portuguese PR education by examining the status quo of the contemporary educational environment and identifying its unique characteristics. Findings were based on content analysis of the Web sites of 14 public universities in Portugal with PR undergraduate and graduate programs. Additionally, educators' opinion regarding curriculums currently in force was also investigated.

Before presenting and discussing the findings concerning PR higher education, the main features of PR profession and teaching in Portugal was assessed, as well as the literature review framing of this research.

PR Education

A brief review of PR in Portugal

Several Portuguese authors (Lampreia, 1996: 92; Fonseca, 1998: 134; Soares & Mendes, 2004: 320) defend that it was the North American multinationals, like Mobile and Shell which introduced PR into Portugal around 1959-1960 and also the Portuguese government admin-

istration, by creating the first PR office in the National Laboratory of Civil Engineering. The Instituto de Novas Profissões (INP) was founded at the same time in 1964 in Lisbon and was the first higher school to offer PR courses. Another obvious manifestation of PR roots in Portugal can be observed in the constitution of the first PR professional association in Portugal in 1968, called SOPREP.

It must be emphasized that the PR profession's seeds were sown in a time of intense internal commotion. Portugal had lived through 49 years of dictatorial rule up to 1974, in a regime, which severely restricted civil and political freedom. The absence of freedom of speech and the tight censorship on mass media, overly limited any information or intervention freedom. Over the years following the revolution in 1974, the economic and political development of the country enabled the PR profession to evolve substantially. The pressure of a competitive market and of a more interventionist state demanded the constitution of information services from both government and private institutions. Simultaneously the expansion of the media system incited the necessity of establishing practitioner relations with the mass media. Journalists were the main source of PR recruitment in this period for internal communication departments in the several organizations. These same practitioners would then later constitute the first PR consultants, specialized in media relations.

The increase in the demand for PR practitioners is also accompanied by an increase in the offer of higher education degrees in Social Communication, in Lisbon. Despite from being courses called broadband in communication, they already included disciplines dedicated to PR. The communication teaching boom really comes about at the end of the 1980s, with the multiplication, throughout the country, of social communication courses, journalism and communication sciences by various higher education institutions, universities and polytechnics.

Various entities are founded also at the end of the 1980s with the intention of affiliating practitioners and promoting the recognition of the PR profession. The Portuguese Association of Communication and PR Consultancies (APECOM) is constituted in 1989 and the Business Communication Association (APCE) in 1990. Whilst the first represents the consultancy communication companies, the second supports the companies, organizations, respective technicians, and students in the business communication area.

The political and economic stability of the country following the adhesion of Portugal to the European Union in 1986 would come to very positively and effectively influence the development of PR in Portugal. The 1990s, in particular, are characterized by a period of substantial consolidation and expansion in both the business domain and govern-

ment institutions. Studies in 1994 prove that 70% of government sector organizations and 87% of private sector organizations have PR functions (Soares & Mendes, 2004: 323).

Summarizing, the 1960s can be considered as the chronological mark of the beginning of PR in Portugal, which was visible in business, academic and associative outlook initiatives. The evolution of the profession starts after the revolution in 1974 and goes on until the 1990s. It is a progressive growth phase, which is particularly consolidated in the 1990s, in both professional and educational levels. At the turn of the century PR in Portugal enters the maturity phase, with the consolidation of the number of practitioners and the importance of this professional sector and also, with the creation of post-graduation studies and specializations in PR. However, despite the rapid expansion of higher education communication courses and the increasing demand from the target public, as will be analysed later, the scientific area of PR is still in a very embryonic state.

Literature Review on PR Education

Many authors advocate the necessity of specialized and continuous training and furthermore urgency in reaching a consensus about what is the perfect PR curriculum to legitimize the profession in society (Grunig, 1989; Sallot, 1997, 1998; Turk, 1989; Van Leuven, 1989). The interest about public relation education has particularly boomed with the publishing of *The Professional Bond – PR Education and the Practice* (2006), a report on undergraduate and graduate education in the United States. In this study, the Commission on PR Education (CPRE) states that "PR education must be interdisciplinary and broad, particularly in liberal arts and sciences" (p. 43). The publication's executive summary asserts that "it was not meant to be prescriptive, but to present a set of objectives for excellence identified by a cadre of distinguished educators and practitioners".

Additionally, the Commission reports that the ideal PR undergraduate degree would include a minimum of five courses: 1) Introduction to PR (including theory, origin and principles); 2) PR research, measurement and evaluation; 3) PR writing and production; 4) Supervised work experience in PR (internship), and 5) an additional PR course in law and ethics, planning and management, case studies or campaigns (2006: 47). In regard to the master degree, the Commission's research suggests that "graduate education should move toward understanding business, management and PR as strategic management functions" (2006: 7). Therefore, the graduate student should dominate the following content areas: PR theory and concepts; PR law; PR ethics; Global PR; PR applications; PR management; PR research; PR programming and

production; PR publics; Communication processes; Management sciences; Behavioural sciences; Internship and practicum experience; Thesis and capstone project and/or comprehensive exam.

This report was developed by the PR Association of America. However, as their authors stress, "it is simply a point of reference for the development of PR education in other parts of the world" (2006: 5). Since then, there has been in fact an increased in PR education research, both at a national and global level. As regards the national level, several studies show how PR education is evolving in specific countries, for instance at China (Zhang *et al.*, 2011), Portugal (Gonçalves, 2009) and Spain (Xifra, 2007). Special attention has also been paid to the feasibility of creating a global curriculum (Tench & Deflagbe, 2008, Cotton, A.-M., *et al.*, 2009) as well as to a PR global education project (Toth & Aldoory 2010). As the study of Portuguese PR education, taking in account the global guidelines is in the very core of this paper, and it seems important to analyse in detail the last three studies mentioned.

In 2008, the University of Leeds (Tench & Deflagbe, 2008) developed a report to the Global Alliance of PR and Communication Management, in order to assess the possibility of creating a global curriculum for PR education. The Toward a Global Curriculum report recommended building a global curriculum that respected potential cultural differences, the tension between uniformity and diversity of program elements, and the need for partnering with industry and other relevant bodies to create appropriate educational competencies (Tench & Deflagbe, 2008, pp. 18-24).

The year after, the European PR Education and Research Association (Euprera) developed the EduProject profiling PR undergraduate and graduate programs in Europe and beyond (Cotton *et al.*, 2009). Centring attention in the information collected about the ideal BA programme, the study revealed that, from a 27 list of courses, the most highly valued were: PR Theory, PR Strategies and Communication models, strategies, and theories; Communication techniques: writing skills, media training; PR Practice and Deontology/ethics. Regarding the ideal master programme, in a 20 courses list, the highest ranking were: Communication, models, strategies, theories; PR Strategies; PR Theory; Research Methods; Deontology/ethics; Communication Research; and Dissertation.

More recently, the PR Association Foundation (PRSA) founded the study A First Look: An in-depth Analysis of Global PR Education (Toth and Aldoory, 2010) aiming to describe the status of PR education globally. As stated in the Executive Summary, this project relayed on previous work in PR education in order to "broaden the geographic scope of study and stressed in-depth qualitative discourse as a basis for

its conclusions" (p. 2). The key findings of the Global education project (Toth & Aldoory, 2010, p. 2-3) were: 1) PR is generally defined as a strategic function for building and maintaining relationships; 2) Undergraduate programs are basically designed to prepare future practitioners; 3) Curriculum frequently reflects the five-course standard suggested in the Commission of PR Educations 2006 report, "The Professional Bond; 4) However, important cultural distinctions are often embedded within programs; 5) Barriers to development of "the ideal PR program" include resources, government, country culture, program structure, and inadequate or ineffective relationships with practicing professionals; and 6) Graduate programs emphasize advanced theory and strategic thinking.

According to the authors' Global education project, "one of the more striking findings was the large number of participants who reported undergraduate programs reflective of the five-course standard recommended in The Professional Bond. Almost three-quarters of the participants, from across various continents, expressed some version of the five-course standard. These participants taught PR principles; PR writing; research methods; campaigns or cases courses; and offered a professional experience/internship" (Toth & Aldoory, 2010: 14).

Methods

Based upon the literature review about PR education, the present article seeks to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the profile of the Portuguese BA and master's degrees in PR found on the Web?

RQ2: To what extent does the BA programme of studies in PR reflects the five-course standard recommendation of the Professional Bond, regarding the Portuguese reality?

RQ3: To what extent does the 14 content areas recommendation (Professional Bond) apply, or not, to the master degrees in PR, regarding the Portuguese reality?

RQ4: To what extent the graduate programs emphasize advanced theory and strategic thinking?

For this study, a qualitative content analysis was conducted, where the unit of analysis was each BA and Master's level PR program found mostly on the World Wide Web. 14 BA and 8 MA programs listed in the directory of the Portuguese Education and Science Ministry were studied. Programs of study were coded for the presence of the pre-defined courses and content descriptions. The majority of programs were located in Communication Faculties or Departments, just two in Management and Business Faculties.

After analysing the findings, in-depth interviews were conducted with PR professors about the main objectives of the BA and MA programs of studies. An interview guide of open-ended questions was used to facilitate the interview process. Interviews were conducted over the phone and interview transcripts and notes were analysed qualitatively through open coding. Conclusions were drawn by identifying themes or patterns, clustering categories, and noting the relationships among patterns.

Findings

The Portuguese higher education system has public and private universities, both with 1st (BA), 2nd (Master) and 3rd cycles (PhD). In this study the assessment is over the BA and Master programs with PR courses, which are offered in public schools. Was sought for the designation of the BA and Master, as well as the curricula and number of ECTS (European Credits Transfer System)¹ in order to analyse the higher PR education in Portugal concerning the guidelines of the Professional Bond (2006) and the Global education project (2010).

BA programs in Communication/PR

The first criteria was to look for public universities with BA and master programs with the designation of "PR", "Organizational Communication", "Communication Sciences", "Business Communication" or "Institutional Communication" looking simultaneously to the curricula with references to PR courses. As such, and concerning the academic year of 2011/2012, there are in Portugal 1155 BA programs recognized by the Ministry of Education and Science. 42 programs use the designation of "Communication" representing 3.63% of the educational offer (1st cycle). There are 14 BA programs with different designations pre-defined for this study and referred above.

In terms of the programme names it can be stated that on the public higher education sector, there is no BA programs in Portugal with the unique designation of "PR": in the 14 BA programs analysed five uses the designation "Communication and PR", "Advertising and PR", "PR and Communication", "PR and Corporate Communication" or "PR and Secretariat". "Communication Sciences" (five BA programs) is the designation more frequently found, and in this case just one BA have a minor in "Advertising and PR". It is possible to found a BA in "Organizational Communication" with a minor in "Corporate Communication

¹ ECTS (European Credits Transfer System) it is a European system that allows the comparison between the different high education systems in terms of students work.

and PR". In others cases, the programme of studies have some courses in PR fields but are not assumed as a minor in PR.

Table 1. BA programs analysed

Institution	BA Programs Specialization
University of Beira Interior	Communication Sciences
University of Minho	Communication Sciences Specialization: Advertising and Public Relations
New University of Lisbon	Communication Sciences Specialization: Strategic Communication
University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro	Communication Sciences
University of the Azores	Public Relations and Communication
Technical University of Lisbon	Communication Sciences
Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon	Public Relations and Corporate Communication
Polytechnic Institute of Guarda	Communication and Public Relations
Polytechnic Institute of Viseu	Advertising and Public Relations
Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre	Public Relations and Secretariat
Polytechnic Institute of Leiria	Human Relations and Organisational Communication
Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo	Marketing and Corporate Communication
Polytechnic Institute of Porto	Business Communication
Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra	Organisational Communication Specialization: Corporate Communication and Public Relations

Furthermore, and looking to the ECTS when considering the different BA programs, all of them have a total of 180 ECTS within 6 semesters. Looking for the average that PR courses represent on the total of the ECTS can be seen that this does not exceed more than 59.17% of ECTS for PR courses. In this way it is possible to conclude that for the most of the BA programs the courses of PR are not fundamental on the work effort of the students to complete their BA studies in this field. Just one exception for the BA in "PR and Corporate Communication" with 59.17% of ECTS assigned to PR courses. In this case the others courses are distribute by sociology, communication theory, statistic, history, business, advertising and marketing courses.

When considering the Commission (2006, 47) reports for the ideal PR undergraduate degree of five courses: 1) Introduction to PR (including theory, origin and principles); 2) PR research, measurement and evaluation; 3) PR writing and production; 4) Supervised work experience in PR (internship), and 5) an additional PR course in law and ethics, planning and management, case studies or campaigns, it is possible to conclude that the most of the BA programmes in public higher education in Portugal present relevant efforts on the "PR writing

and production”, with 85.71% of the BA programs analysed offering this courses (Table 2).

In fact, the number of ECTS assigned to PR courses for the most of the BA programs are very low and concentrated in “PR writing and production”, which mean:

must include competency in such skills as design, layout and graphics; electronic media and Web publishing; speechwriting and delivery; spokesperson training and speakers bureaus; corporate identity and reputation; photography and filmmaking; and working with outside suppliers. It requires a solid understanding of media, media channels, the societal role of media and the challenges in the explosion of electronic and digital media vehicles. It includes message strategy and delivery (i.e., planning, writing, producing and delivering communication to publics in all media channels). It also includes a focus on designing messages to be sent in channels that will ensure publics receive and act on them. (2006: 46)

Table 2. BA programs analysed/5 courses to BA from CPRE

	Required courses to BA, CPRE (2006)	%
1	Introduction to public relations	71,43
2	Public relations research, measurement and evaluation	42,86
3	Public relations writing and production	85,71
4	Supervised work experience in public relations (internship)	42,86
	PR law and ethics	
5	PR planning and management	78,57*
	PR case studies or campaigns	

*most from courses of “Ethic and Deontology”

The content related to “PR research, measurement and evaluation” which is in 42.86% of the curriculums analysed can be found in subjects dedicated to “research methods”. However, it must be point out, that these disciplines are not exclusively directed towards PR studies, but to any research in the field of communication studies.

Concerning “Introduction to PR” 71.43% of universities offer courses related to “theory, origin and principles”, as recommended by the Commission (2006: 47). Similarly, the additional PR courses (PR law and ethics, planning and management, case studies or campaigns) were found in 78.57% of the curricula, mostly due to the course of “Ethics and Deontology”. Once more, it cannot be forget that those contents are always integrated in a more open course like “Communication ethics or communication law”.

Finally, it must be point out that less than half undergraduate studies offer “Supervised work in PR/internship”.

Table 3. % Five courses (CPRE, 2006) and ECTS per BA Programs analysed

Institution	BA Programs Specialization	% CPRE	% ECTS
		BA five courses	BA five courses
University of Beira Interior	Communication Sciences	80	13,90
	Specialization: Advertising and Public Relations	80	33,33
University of Minho	Communication Sciences	80	33,33
	Specialization: Advertising and Public Relations	80	33,33
New University of Lisbon	Communication Sciences	60	10,00
	Specialization: Strategic Communication	60	10,00
University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro	Communication Sciences	60	2,78
	Public Relations and Communication	60	10,00
University of the Azores	Communication Sciences	60	8,33
	Public Relations and Corporate Communication	60	59,17
Technical University of Lisbon	Communication Sciences	60	8,33
	Public Relations and Corporate Communication	60	59,17
Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon	Communication and Public Relations	100	18,89
	Advertising and Public Relations	60	8,33
Polytechnic Institute of Guarda	Communication and Public Relations	100	18,89
	Advertising and Public Relations	60	8,33
Polytechnic Institute of Viseu	Public Relations and Secretariat	40	17,22
	Public Relations and Secretariat	40	17,22
Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre	Public Relations and Secretariat	40	17,22
	Public Relations and Secretariat	40	17,22
Polytechnic Institute of Leiria	Human Relations and Organisational Communication	40	22,22
	Human Relations and Organisational Communication	40	22,22
Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo	Marketing and Corporate Communication	40	7,78
	Marketing and Corporate Communication	40	7,78
Polytechnic Institute of Porto	Business Communication	40	19,14
	Business Communication	40	19,14
Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra	Organizational Communication	100	31,67
	Specialization: Corporate Communication and Public Relations	100	31,67

Analysing the percentage of the five courses recommended by CPRE (2006) there are two BA who have the five courses (100%) on the BA curriculum, but if crossing this dates with the analyse of the weight of the ECTS on PR courses present on the BA it is possible to see that this five courses don’t have a great weight on the total of the ECTS (31.67% and 18.89%). So, the five courses recommended are present on the BA but with a low weight in terms of ECTS. Just the Polytechnic Institute of Lisboa with the BA in PR and Corporate Communication have some proportion between this dates: from the five courses recommended they have four and those four with 59.17% on the total ECTS of the BA.

MA Programs in Communication/PR

Looking now to Master programs it is possible to observe that in a universe of 59 Masters in the field of communication only three universities assumed the “PR” expression in own name. Overall, the master denomination is “Communication Sciences” or “Communication and Marketing”. In these cases, all the MA courses offer syllabus concerning PR. Nevertheless, around 13.56% of the total of MA in Communication field don’t present any course about PR. These observations have limited our study to 8 MA plans of studies.

In terms of ECTS, it is possible to find a master with 120 or 90 ECTS, but all have two semesters of curricular program and one (in the

case of master with 90 ECTS) or two semesters dedicated to the dissertation or internship report.

For the three masters named "PR" one can conclude that in the curricular semester PR courses have an average of ECTS between 45.83% and 8.33% of the total. Regarding the masters that have the designation of "Communication Sciences", the average of ECTS related to PR contents are between 12.5% and 25% in the total of ECTS. These percentages will increase if the number of ECTS allocated to the Dissertation is considered, since all the masters have a compulsory dissertation (as it is possible to see on the next table), but in the most of the cases it is not sure that the themes for the dissertation are in PR field.

Table 4. MA programs analysed/14 content areas according to CPRE

Institution	Master's Programs	ECTS	%	
			With Dissertation	Without Dissertation
University of Beira Interior	Strategic Communication: Advertising and Public Relations	120	65,00	15,00
University of Minho	Communication Sciences - Specialization in Advertising and Public Relations	120	38,33	8,33 a)
New University of Lisbon	Communication Sciences - Specialization Strategic Communication	90	36,59	21,51 b)
University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro	Communication Sciences	120	60,00	25,00
University of the Azores	Communication Sciences	120	62,50	12,50
Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon	Strategic Management of Public Relations	120	33,33	45,83
Polytechnic Institute of Guarda	Marketing and Communication	90	20,00	16,67
Polytechnic Institute of Viseu	Communication and Marketing	90	42,22	17,78

a) Research's line

b) Professionalization line

The CPRE recommends that a graduate student "should master the following content areas beyond undergraduate competencies: PR theory and concepts; PR law; PR ethics; Global PR; PR applications; PR management; PR research; PR programming and production; PR public relations; Communication processes; Management sciences; Behavioural sciences; Thesis and capstone project and/or comprehensive exam". As to the Portuguese case, different conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of the data in Table 5.

Table 5. MA programs analysed/14 content areas according to CPRE

CPRE (2006) Master Revised Content Areas	%
Public relations theory and concepts	25,00
Public relations law	0,00
Public relations ethics	37,50
Global public relations	0,00
Public relations applications	62,50
Public relations management	75,00
Public relations research	12,50
Public relations programming and production	50,00
Public relations public relations	50,00
Communication processes	75,00
Management sciences	75,00
Behavioural sciences	37,50
Internship or practicum experience	100,00
Thesis and/or capstone project and/or comprehensive exam	100,00

In general, there was little consistency in the content of the curricula of master's programs in PR offered by the eight universities. Each school showed different perceptions of its master's program in PR. Using the 14 content areas suggested by the 2006 CPRE as a framework of analysis it can be concluded that none of the schools matched the Commission's "ideal" curricula.

First of all, it is obvious that the majority of these schools particularly emphasized communication theory over "PR theory and concepts". 75% of the plan of studies listed communication theory courses but only 25% included a PR theory course.

With regard to the area of "PR management" and "management sciences" both content areas are listed in 75% of the master programmes under analyse. This means that only two MA programs do not offer management contents. Concerning to "PR management" the mentioned report states that that this area "(...) should considerer how PR managed in a diverse world of political, economic systems and distinct cultural voices"(p. 53). The analysis shows that the focus of this objective emphasizes on one hand the political discourse of the institution through the analysis of case studies, on the other hand the image dimension as a central paradigm linked to the power of organizational identity. In "management science" the courses offered are predominantly focused on marketing. Regarding to "PR research" only one university offers courses related to research methods in PR, despite all MA includes

social sciences methodology or applied research methods in communication sciences.

The content areas more related to operational PR, such as, “PR applications”, “PR programming and production” or “PR publics”, were also found in only half of the eight plans of studies. With regard to the studies of the publics it is noted that the contents have also aspects of “PR management” area. A course in “PR ethics” is seldom included in the MA programmes, once just three of the eight schools offer this core content.

This way it can be stated that the majority of these master programs give relevance to knowledge in communication field. Nevertheless if a look is taken to the nine areas directly related with PR it is possible to conclude that “PR management” and “PR application” are the most relevant areas. Current issues such as health care, business, technology, etc. regarding to “PR application” area are explored in the courses analysed, observing that the issues of public interest are also addressed in the practical context.

Moreover, apart from “behavioural sciences”, that is included in only three plan of studies, the less important contents are “PR law” and “Global PR”, as it doesn’t exist in any of the masters programs. In contrast, “Internship and Dissertation” were the most consensual recommendation of the 2006 CPRE in the master plan of studies. The graduate students’ option to write a dissertation or to develop an internship (followed by internship report) exists in all the Master courses.

Finally, crossing all these data with the analysis of the following table (6) it may be concluded that on the overall of 14 areas, they represent up to a maximum weight of 64.29% on the total of the content. Even for the master’s programme in communication sciences with a specialization in PR the 14 areas represent a maximum of 57.14% on the total of the contents of the master. That’s mean that others areas are addressed different from the 14 recommended on the most of the master’s programs in communication sciences with PR courses. It should be note that the percentages on the Table 6 represent the weight of the 14 areas recommended on the total of the contents of the curriculum of the master with the dissertation or project included. Again, it is necessary to say that the theme of the dissertation can be or not on PR field.

Table 6. % Content areas (CPRE, 2006) per MA Programs analysed

Institution	Master's Programs	% CPRE (2006) Master Revised Content Areas
University of Beira Interior	Strategic Communication Advertising and Public Relations	57,14
University of Minho	Communicative Sciences - Specialization in Advertising and Public Relations	35,71
New University of Lisbon	Communicative Sciences - Specialization: Strategic Communications	57,14
University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro	Communicative Sciences	57,14
University of the Azores	Communicative Sciences	57,14
Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon	Strategic Management of Public Relations	64,29
Polytechnic Institute of Guarda	Marketing and Communication	42,86
Polytechnic Institute of Viseu	Communication and Marketing	38,57

Interview results

Despite that so far only four interviews were concluded, we notice some consistency among the answers and between these and the results previously presented. Firstly, all the participants stress that PR should be an academic area of study with an interdisciplinary focus, including communication, management science, etc. When asked to explain such opinion, interviewees reasoned that a PR professional’s job requires a broad range of knowledge. Nevertheless, all emphasized communication sciences as the best localization to higher education in PR.

In regard to the undergraduate degree, participants’ opinion were consensual regarding the fact the Bologna Treat context (three years of study) limited the time to prepare practitioners to the professional market, mainly because in a Communication Sciences degree there are few mandatory courses in PR. In fact, the communication sciences plan of studies is traditionally divided into two parts. One part, which is introductory, is centred on the interdisciplinary offer in the liberal arts and social sciences area and also on communication theory contents. The second curricular part is constituted by optional branches for which students can choose among specific education in journalism, PR, advertising or audiovisual communication. For that reason, as one respondent emphasized, some students can finish their degree having approved just one or two courses with PR contents.

Interviewees considered that, therefore, a master in PR is central for enhance professional skills, not only through the set of practical courses offered (for example, PR laboratories or ateliers) but mostly, because of the opportunity to develop an internship in an organization during, at least, three months. When talking about practical courses, the four professors stressed that those courses are taught with a strategic framework in mind. In other words, they stress that PR is not just writing

press releases but firstly, "to know what, who, where, when, why and how that press release is an important piece of the organization overall strategy".

Furthermore, one respondent consider that in a very near future having a master in this field of expertise will be "the key to enter in the labour market". However, although the master is considered a path to professional activity, it is also underlined as being essential to stimulate theory through the production of a master dissertation. According to the interviewed professors writing a dissertation is in the core of a Master degree, not only because it implies an entire year of dedication, but also because implies its public defence. And, in some cases, as one professor underlined, "depending on the student level, a master dissertation can really contribute to enhance PR scientific domain".

Conclusion

The present study was divided into two principal moments. In the first place, the study plans of current courses along with the objectives and curricular programs offered in public education in Portugal in both BA and Master's degrees in PR were analysed and then, in the second place, the results gathered in this former content analysis lead to the development of in-depth interviews with the professors of four courses previously analysed, with the aim of better understanding their views on current PR curricula and to hear their opinions on the "ideal" curriculum.

It can be seen through an analysis of higher public education websites that the generality of courses in the communication sciences field is broadband. The fact that all the curriculums had disciplines within the scope of liberal arts, social sciences and business was evident when analysing BA programmes of studies. However, the importance given to the disciplines centralized in PR is not so consensual by comparing the syllabus of the disciplines *vis-à-vis* with the five PR study areas recommended by the Commission on PR Education and the weight of ECTS. "PR research, measurement and evaluation" and "Supervised work in PR/internship" don't exist in less than 50% of the undergraduate degrees and even for those BA who have the five courses recommended, they don't have a strong weight in terms of ECTS on the BA.

This way and in what concern the RQ2 the BA programme of studies in PR reflects the five-course standard recommendation of the Professional Bond, regarding the Portuguese reality, but this conclusion it must be cross with the students work effort (ECTS). Doing that crossing it is concluded that the five-course standards are present but with low weight in terms of ECTS. The results of this study reveal therefore that,

in public higher education in Portugal, PR undergraduate studies are compounded by strong education in communication studies but by insufficient education in PR. This conclusion was corroborated with the number of ECTS attributed to the PR courses in relation to the total of ECTS in both level of studies but particularly in the undergraduate plan of studies (RQ1).

Similarly, concerning the 14 content areas Master recommendation, the results of this study reveal that those content areas (Professional Bond) are present on all of the master's programmes, with the exception for "PR law" and "Global PR". However, the weight of the 14 content areas don't represent more than 64% of the total of the contents of the master's programmes and those who have more weight are "Communication Process", "Management Sciences" and "PR Management". If we attend just the specific PR areas of content just "PR Management" and "PR Applications" have a weight up than 50% (RQ3).

In regard to the RQ4, preliminary findings show that it is fragile any conclusion. In fact in order to have a strong conclusion about advanced theory and strategic thinking it would be necessary to analyse the content of the master's dissertations. It is true that as all master's programmes have a mandatory dissertation, as well as it is given a significant weight to the management sciences it is legit concluded that the strategic thinking is present on the graduate programs. This conclusion can be reinforced by the opinion of the interviewed professors which their opinion is "depending on the student level, a master dissertation can really contribute to enhance PR scientific domain" and this way emphasize advanced theory and strategic thinking.

In public higher education in Portugal both PR undergraduate and graduate degrees are strong in communication studies but insufficient regarding education in PR. Hence, the ensemble of universities which claim to offer PR education contribute to the academic and scientific solidification of communication courses in the Portuguese university but not necessarily to the consolidation of PR studies.

Since this is an in progress study all the conclusion will be reinforced by increasing the number of interview at master's and BA professors as well as with a review of the bibliographies used and to the themes of the different dissertation produced in these master's in order to understand better the skills and competence that this students have on the end of the BA or the master.

Our study has made an initial step toward theorizing Portuguese PR education through the analysis of the programs of study and in-depth interviews with professors. It is hoped that research findings presented here will assist PR educators in their efforts to plan and offer high-

quality BA and MA degrees for their students. Doing so will benefit the legitimization of PR academic field now and in the future.

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PART II

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS: NEW DILEMMAS, CONCEPTS AND CHANGING PERSPECTIVES