

AN ALUMNI-BASED EVALUATION OF PCOM

An Alumni-based Evaluation of Undergraduate Training in Public Communication: Results of a Survey
on Messages, Careers, Salaries, and Competencies

Samuel Patterson

University of Vermont

Table of Contents

Introduction..... 1

Literature Review 1

 Organizational Identity and Paradox 1

 Organizational Identity and Paradox in Higher Education..... 2

 Organizational Communication Audits 4

 Community Development and Applied Economics 6

Methods 10

 Participants 10

 Instrument 10

 Procedure 11

 Analysis 12

Analysis 14

 Research Question 1 14

 Research Question 2 21

 Research Question 3 24

Discussion..... 28

AN ALUMNI-BASED EVALUATION OF PCOM

Scholarly Contributions	28
Practical Contributions	29
Limitations.....	31
Future Research	32
Concluding Thoughts.....	33
Growth as a Communicator Statement	33
References.....	35
Appendix A.....	39
Appendix B.....	41

Introduction

In this thesis, I provide the Public Communication program at UVM with a variety of information about how its graduates are using their degrees, the opposing tensions present in the program, as well as identify certain messages and slogans that resonate with graduates. Additionally, the identification of how current students are using their degrees will help provide faculty the information to better tailor the program as well as provide current students an idea of some career choices available to them upon graduation. Ultimately, this research will shed light on Public Communication as an undergraduate program and give more clarity as to the purpose and direction of the program as a whole.

Literature Review

Organizational Identity and Paradox

The concept of identity and membership is crucial to the continued growth and development of any organization. “Organizational identity explains perceptions of an organization’s principles, services, and people. It is what members believe to be the most fundamental and distinctive features of their organization” (Lerpold, Ravasi, Rekom, and Soennen, 2007). An organization’s identity is “relatively shared by members and/or upheld by its leaders, and often emphasized in formal corporate statements and expressions” (Lerpold et al., 2007, p. 2). Formal communication generally consists of messages sent through emails, newsletters, and press releases, while informal communication is more loosely bounded by the conversations and interactions members of an organization have with one another (Kraut, Fish, Root, & Chalfonte, 2002). An organization's identity can be created through formal and informal communication among organizational leaders, members, consumers, and to some degree, outside community members.

Identities are perceptions of belonging in an organization that can be shaped by a variety of organizational variables, including organizational paradoxes. Organizational paradoxes are created and

perpetuated through social practices that create opposite forces in expectations, roles, or actions. For example, paradoxes often naturally emerge when an organization defines who it is, what they do, and how they do it (Clegg, 2002). Such tensions may include exploring vs. exploiting, stability vs. flexibility, control vs. freedom, or any other opposing elements presented when an organization creates its identity (Weick, 1979).

Organizational paradoxes are inherent within any organization (Cameron, 1988). They are neither good nor bad. Members must constantly negotiate tensions, as organizational identity is inevitably affected when members of an organization struggle with these opposing tensions. If members are not able to explain and navigate these paradoxes, it becomes more difficult to create a unified organizational identity that all members can rally behind (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Helping members identify and manage competing tensions is desirable and associated with long-run organizational success (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Organizational Identity and Paradox in Higher Education

A person's sense of identity within an organization is equally important when that organization is an institution of higher education. Faculty, administration, staff, students, and alumni are all members of higher education organizations. In addition to being a part of the university, these stakeholders also identify with smaller sub-organizations within the institution including colleges, department, majors, and minors (Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

Students and alumni are important stakeholders that identify with higher education institutions and that shape, and are shaped by, issues of organizational identity. Students are not only consumers of education, they are also changed by that experience and become a product of the institution in the eyes of others outside the organization, such as employers (Lovelock & Rothschild, 1980). A sense of identity will be formed from the shared experiences during one's time at an institution. While it is largely up to students and alumni to shape their own identity from those experiences, organizations can

set the framework and structure from which students can understand the identity of the program/department.

Organizational paradoxes present in the university setting can often stand in the way of a strong organizational identity. For example, paradoxes often present in the higher education system include students complaining that their major is too narrow or too focused, too much theory based or too practical. However, an organization can improve its effectiveness if it understands and embraces these organizational paradoxes. One example comes from a study conducted by Cameron (1985, 1986) that looked at what factors account the improvement of organizational effectiveness in colleges and universities. The findings were that institutions that improve effectiveness have an infusion of new leaders as well as maintain continuity and stability among top administrators. Additionally, institutions that emphasize internal morale issues among members, while simultaneously are market sensitive and reactive to external demands. Through this study, we see that effective programs can be built and sustained through this paradoxical approach to managing an organization. Similarly, its organizational identity is stronger when members can embrace these opposing forces as opposed to struggling with them (Cameron, 1988).

There are a number of ways educational organizations can create and foster organizational identity among its members. The mission statement is a fundamental method for creating a framework from which students can develop their identity within the organization (Conway, Mackay, & Yorke, 1994). The mission statement often leads to an increased sense of purpose in dealing with the issues of why the organization exists and whom it serves (Pearce, 1982). Additionally, there is often a mission statement for each program or major within a university. Students will be able to form a stronger identity with that particular program's statement because the majority of their time will be spent taking courses in that particular field. It is important that the mission statement be something that both students and

alumni can rally behind because maintaining organizational membership and identity continues well after graduation (Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

Besides mission statements, personnel, program curriculum, social base, and student subculture are all elements that also help compose organizational identity (Clark, 1972). Additionally, guidance from faculty through advising, mentoring, and other interactions with students are beneficial in helping them understand the organization's identity and navigate some of the tensions present. When combined, these elements create a powerful means of unity in an organization. "It makes links across internal divisions and organizational boundaries as internal and external groups share their common belief" (Clark, 1972).

Graduates of a particular program are among some of the strongest stakeholders in an organization. Their actions and opinions will reflect back on the organization and construct its identity and membership with community members for years to come. Furthermore, alumni often give back to their alma mater in the form of networking, guest lecturing, and, frequently, financial donations (Bakal 1979). Developing and maintaining an organizational identity/membership with graduates is among the most important ways an organization can track its success and promote itself because "few constituents are more important to an institution than its alumni" (Ransdell, 1986, p. 378). While alumni are valuable members of academic organizations, to date, few scholars have studied this group.

Organizational Communication Audits

While organizational identity and member identification are important factors in an organization's success and shared vision in a community, they rely on continued definition and redefinition of mission, values, and services for new and existing members (Hargie & Tourish, 2009). Communication audits serve as a critical component in measuring the continuing development and success in any organization's communication efforts. Henderson (2005) described communications

audits as a process “designed to examine and evaluate an organization’s communication program; to reveal hurdles to effective communication, to reveal gaps in the communication process, and to provide suggestions for improvement” (Henderson, 2005, p. 312). It is through the process of communication audits that an organization can identify how well it is currently creating and what it could do in the future to create a common understanding of organizational identity between its various stakeholders.

While there are many different ways to execute a communications audit, it is important to understand a few basic steps to follow when carrying out an audit. Owen Hargie lays out five steps necessary for developing and administering a successful audit (Hargie, 2009):

Step 1: Research the organizational background

Step 2: Ascertain the purpose

Step 3: Consider a variety of existing instruments

Step 4: Determine the proper instrument - either existing or custom-designed

Step 5: Make appropriate adaptations to the survey

By following these steps, an organization can identify strengths and weaknesses in their organizational structure or communication practices. Then the auditor makes recommendations, and at times designs messages, that the organization can take to correct, maintain, or improve their structure and communication.

Educational institutions, like other organizations, often complete communications audits. These audits can happen at the university, college, and department level. For example, Edgar and Hyde (2005) completed a communications audit on the Emerson/Tufts Master’s Program in Health Communication. This study aimed to answer numerous questions the department and its students might have about expectations for their professional pursuits as well as the program’s effectiveness in preparing its students for those professional goals. The study followed a questionnaire approach and used email to

reach out to the 131 existing graduates of the program. In preparing the survey, Edgar and Hyde asked a variety of questions designed to gather information about the following:

Detailed contact information; complete job history since graduating with the master's degree in health communication; educational history prior to obtaining the health communication graduate degree; sector of health communication in which the alumni currently (or mostly recently) works; salary expectations for individuals with a master's degree in health communication; information on how they obtained jobs after leaving the program; assessment of the education that they received while in the Emerson/Tufts program; and observations about emerging trends in the health communication field.(p. 11)

Using the results from their survey, Edgar and Hyde developed messages and publications that depicted the future landscape for Health Communication professionals, and especially, for those graduating from the joint-program between Emerson College and Tufts University. Additionally, they were able to gauge alumni students' levels of satisfaction with the program and identify those core competencies most important for success in the Health Communication field. This communications audit clearly provided relevant information to students, graduates, and faculty affiliated with the Health Communication program.

The current study is inspired by Edgar and Hyde's (2005) applied research and subsequent message strategy for their Health Communication program. Specifically, this study conducts a communication audit of the Public Communication undergraduate major at the University of Vermont. The next section of the literature review, describes the context of my study, the department of Community Development and Applied Economics and Public Communication major. I explain the findings of a pilot study I conducted with faculty and staff associated with the PCOM major.

Community Development and Applied Economics

The department of Community Development and Applied Economics (CDAE) at the University of Vermont (UVM) was created in 1994 from the convergence of three departments in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs): Agricultural and Resource Economics (ARE), Merchandising, Consumer Studies and Design (MCSD), and Vocational Education and Technology (VET) (Baker et al., 2009). From its birth CDAE was built around the principle of a transdisciplinary approach to scholarship. Transdisciplinary scholarship asks scholars, learners and community members to “go beyond linear application of a static methodology and aims for an evolving, dynamic, or responsive methodology that is iterative and an ongoing part of the research process” (Wickson et al., 2006, p. 1,051). In other words, the transdisciplinary approach asks people employ a strategy that crosses many disciplinary boundaries and to look at the problem from a broader perspective, outside of any individual discipline.

CDAE has worked to create programs that embraced this idea of transdisciplinary learning through service learning, applied projects, as well as international courses and projects (Baker et al., 2009). The department is currently home to three undergraduate majors and eight minors. The first major, Community and International Development, focuses on real world issues, both local and international, and identifies the underlying social, economic, and cultural factors that can affect development (UVM, 2013). The second, Community Entrepreneurship, deals more primarily with the foundations of enterprise development including strategic planning, marketing techniques, and market analytics. Lastly, Public Communication teaches students an integrated approach that understands the importance of strategic message creation in an increasingly global society. The CDAE department also hosts two master’s programs in Community Development and Applied Economics along with Public Administration with a total of 25 students.

In 2005, The Public Communication (PCOM) major was added to the CDAE department. “Public Communication arose from the increasing demand for an advertising minor that focused on

consumer well-being and the tradition at many Land Grant institutions to house majors based on Extension education and communication” (Baker et al., 2009 p. 40). There are three learning goals identified on the Public Communication website that help explain the objectives of the major. According to the CDAE website (UVM, 2013), they are:

1. Learn trans-disciplinary theories, methods, and tools in preparation for supporting sustainable and ethical community-based public policies and communications.
2. Communicate effectively using appropriate technologies and employing written, oral, and visual techniques.
3. Engage in services learning opportunities applying public policy theories and communication skills in the public interest.

Public Communication fits well into the rest of the CDAE department because of this focus on the public interest. The PCOM curriculum includes traditional communication degree courses such as marketing/advertising, strategic writing, public affairs, and visual communication, but also includes courses such as Public Communication Media, Community Development Economics, and Sustainable Community Development, that are more unique to PCOM and focus on community development and the public interest (UVM, 2011).

The Public Communication major first launched in the spring of 2005 with nine students declaring Public Communication as their major that semester (Dorschner, 2009). The program graduated its first set of students in the spring of 2006. Between 2005 and 2012, 201 individuals have received their undergraduate degree in Public Communication from UVM.

The newness of the PCOM major and the unique fit of CDAE and PCOM within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences make the PCOM major an interesting organization to study with regards to their organizational messages. For my thesis research, I was most interested in organizational

members' definitions of PCOM. Specifically, my research was guided by the question: How do organizational members define Public Communication?

In the fall of 2012, I performed a pilot study on faculty, staff, and administrators affiliated with the Public Communication major and CDAE department (For survey, see Appendix A). I administered an online survey, which included questions regarding messages, definitions, and slogans of PCOM being disseminated to students by these department members. Analysis of the results showed that there is no central or consistent message being told to prospective, current, or graduated students. Based on the literature surrounding consistent messaging and identification, this finding suggests that the CDAE department could enhance its organizational identity and identification of members by providing a consistent message for members to rally behind.

In sum, results of the survey show that faculty members who teach, advise, or otherwise interact with PCOM students tell students varying messages that lack a central or consistent theme. From these findings, I drew the conclusion that I could apply my training in communication audits and familiarity with the literature on organizational communication to conduct a communication audit of the PCOM major to develop recommendations concerning the organizational messaging around PCOM. I decided I would need to seek data from a different stakeholder group to develop a definition. Specifically, I decided to talk to alumni about their experiences in the PCOM program because this is a valuable stakeholder group that has received little research focus in the context of organizational communication in higher education. My honors paper is based on the questions:

RQ 1. What competing tensions emerge when Public Communication alumni describe the PCOM program?

RQ 2. What types of messages resonate with Public Communication alumni?

RQ 3. What career outcomes are associated with a degree in PCOM?

In the following sections, I describe how I used survey methods and both qualitative and quantitative analysis to explore these questions. I analyze the survey results. I conclude by discussing the implications of my findings on future communication and message efforts associated with PCOM.

Methods

Participants

The goal of this study was to gather information from individuals who graduated with a Public Communication degree from UVM. Currently, graduates of the PCOM major date back to the spring of 2006. After graduating three students that year, the major has grown significantly and graduated 43 students in 2012.

To date, there are 201 graduates of Public Communication at UVM. The average number of years since graduation for respondents is three with the highest number of respondents being two years removed from school. Survey respondents ranged from 22 to 28 years old, with the highest number of respondents (n=12) being born in 1988 and the mean also being born just before 1988. Additionally, 155 (77%) PCOM graduates are female, while only 46 (23%) are male.

Instrument

I created an online survey instrument that asked for information regarding graduates perceptions of the PCOM identity, the activities and messages that taught them that identity, and their career outcomes. Specifically, I asked questions concerning graduates definitions of Public Communication, potential slogans/messages the department could use to define Public Communication, strengths and weaknesses of the PCOM major, along with graduates' current industry of employment, place of employment, and industry salaries (For survey, see Appendix B).

Using LimeSurvey, the UVM-sponsored online survey development tool, I created an online survey. To ensure anonymity for the respondents, the survey was sent via a link that did not identify the individual completing the survey. After all the questions for the survey were created, the survey was

divided into three sections based on the nature of the questions. The first section was titled “Identifying Public Communication” and contained four questions regarding how graduates define public communication at UVM, strengths and weaknesses of the program, and which slogans/messages about the program they agree/disagree with. The second section was titled “Current Professional Standing” and contained eleven questions about their professional life post-graduation. These questions included salary expectations, industry of employment, how long it took to find a career-relevant job, as well as any skill sets/concepts missing from the Public Communication major that might prove helpful in their current job. The final section was titled “Demographics” and included eight questions to help paint a more complete picture of who was completing the survey, while still maintaining anonymity.

Procedure

Upon request, UVM’s Alumni Office provided a list of names and current email information for everyone who had graduated with a degree in Public Communication. Of the 201 individuals known to have graduated with a PCOM degree, the Alumni Office had records of 120 alumni emails. Using this list, an initial email was sent to recruit participants. It contained the link to the online survey and explained the research that was being conducted, how it would benefit the program, and asking if any of the graduates would like to see results from the research upon completion. It also encouraged graduates to pass along the survey link to any other Public Communication alumni they might still be in contact with in case our email did not reach them. This method of participant recruitment is referred to as ‘snowballing’ (Edgar & Hyde, 2005). Based on the recommendations of Edgar and Hyde (2005) for online survey recruitment, a similar email was sent to the list three times over the course of four weeks.

Because nine email addresses were not working addresses and many other graduates had no documented email address, it was determined that the alumni office did not have up to date email addresses or email addresses altogether for many of the graduates. Although it was included in the original email for graduates to use this ‘snowball technique’ of passing the survey along to other

graduates they were still connected with, it was necessary to establish another method of connection with graduates to encourage them to complete the survey. Using the names of PCOM graduates provided by the alumni office, the professional networking website LinkedIn was used to connect with graduates. I successfully connected to 70 graduates using this method. Once connected, I sent a message asking them to complete the survey if they had not already completed it. I included a link to the survey and once again asked for them to pass it along to any other graduates that they might be connected with on social networking sites.

Ultimately, 120 alumni with working emails and 70 alumni with LinkedIn Accounts were contacted (with overlap). Of those graduates, 98 clicked the survey link and 48 graduates fully completing the survey. Based on the 120 alumni with working email addresses, the response rate was 40%, which is within the range of acceptable response rates for online survey methods (Hamilton, 2003). Because of the limited number of graduates who responded to the survey, I used convenience sampling to select the subjects.

Analysis

To analyze the results of my survey I plan to use both qualitative and quantitative methods. Based on the three research questions, I will employ the method of analysis that best suits the nature of each question:

RQ 1. What competing tensions emerge when Public Communication alumni describe the PCOM program? For this question, I will use qualitative analysis to discern the most consistent definitions and descriptions of the Public Communication experience given by PCOM graduates. Specifically, I will analyze response to survey questions which asked graduates to define Public Communication at UVM as well as identify any strengths and weaknesses in the program.

Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information that allows the researcher to search for prevalent themes throughout responses to a given question (Boyatzis, 1998). In order to

ensure this type of analysis can be considered useful and effective, there are four criteria necessary for evaluating qualitative data: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is important in a thematic analysis to honor participants voices by including their responses . Thematic analysis is best suited for this research question because it “provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 5). The purpose of this analysis will be to see how graduates of Public Communication view their major.

RQ 2. What types of messages resonate with Public Communication alumni? For this question, I will use quantitative analysis to determine which of the messages and slogans tested in the survey resonates most with Public Communication alumni. The first survey question asks about whether graduates strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree with three different statements about the Public Communication major. I will code these responses and use descriptive statistics to determine which statement resonates most with graduates through frequency of each response as well as a percentage breakdown of agreement level for each response. The second question asks if the PCOM department were going to consider a new slogan, how graduates would rank each of five potential slogans on a scale from one to five. I will again use descriptive statistics to determine which slogan(s) are the most popular among graduates as well as which are least popular. The purpose of this analysis will be to gain quantifiable data about which messages and slogans resonate most with graduates.

RQ 3. What career outcomes are associated with a degree in PCOM? The final research question incorporates survey items that asked about participant’s career field, salary expectations, non-profit vs. for-profit, and social responsible nature of employer. For each question, I will use descriptive statistics to breakdown responses and show both the frequency and percentage of graduates in each category. This will help clearly illustrate the information and show the breakdown of PCOM graduates

in these various career related categories. The purpose of this information will be to show current students a clear breakdown of what can be expected from receiving a Public Communication degree.

Analysis

The data collected in this research will be analyzed to most effectively answer the research questions outlined in this paper. First, I will explore the organizational paradoxes present in the Public Communication major through a thematic analysis. The subsequent research questions will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to present information on potential messages for the Public Communication program as well as career expectations for those graduating with a PCOM degree.

RQ 1: What competing tensions emerge when Public Communication alumni describe the PCOM program? The first research question focuses on how alumni perceive the Public Communication major. From survey responses, I argue there are three organizational paradoxes present within alumni perceptions of the Public Communication major at UVM.

The first tension present in graduate's perceptions of Public Communication deals with freedom vs. focus. PCOM and the entire CDAE department were built around the idea of a transdisciplinary approach to learning. This transdisciplinary approach asks students to take 18 credit hours of "core" course work in courses related to community development, applied economics, and communication. The major then allows students the freedom to learn about communication through a variety of different lenses by taking 34 credit hours worth of communication courses in topics ranging from media to writing to law. Finally, students select 15 credit hours of elective courses in topics ranging from graphic design to marketing/advertising to socially responsible public relations and many others. It allows students to learn about a large number of possible career fields without having to choose any one in particular.

Many graduates appreciate the program for allowing them the freedom to explore and acknowledge this in their responses:

- “PCOM requires students to take a wide variety of different classes that examine different aspects of communication and sustainability”
- “Variety of classes give the whole picture--public speaking, computer applications, community development, and applied economics, etc.”
- “Incorporating so much more than just marketing and advertising classes was a huge strength for me. I enjoyed the different classes like sustainable development and communication law.”
- “[A strength was] the wide range of topics covered. The opportunity for students to pursue various disciplines within PCOM.”
- “As a Public Communication major at UVM, I feel as though I was exposed to a wide range of communication concepts. I developed a foundation of knowledge that could be developed and expanded upon.”

It is clear that graduates appreciate the opportunity they had to explore the many different facets of communication while they are still trying to figure out their passion or particular interest within the field. They see it as an opportunity to explore many disciplines and develop a foundation of knowledge that will give them a solid base for a variety of different career fields upon graduation.

While this breadth of study allows students the freedom to explore, many would have preferred the ability to focus on a particular area. A number of graduates say that the freedom to explore many disciplines causes a lack of focus within any one particular field. Many respondents said that they would have preferred the ability to focus in a particular area, so they would be better prepared for a profession in that field upon graduation. Similarly, other graduates responded that the breadth of studies in PCOM did not allow them to narrow down to their specific interest or passion. This criticism of focus or depth in a particular area was also evident in graduates responses:

- “Public Communication is pretty broad however, so it may help if there was a specific focus to narrow down students’ interests.”

- “A weakness would be the help and advising in making your major specific.”
- “[One weakness is that there was] not a true focus, [it was an] open-ended major (which is also a strength in ways) [which made it] harder to find a job after college.”
- “A weakness is the degree to which students are encouraged to explore the AMAZING variety of positions and jobs where these skills are applicable.”
- If you were interested in a particular aspect of PCOM, there was no way to delve further into that specific niche”

Whether it be for professional pursuits or personal interests, many graduates argue that the Public Communication major lacks a certain focus or depth in any particular area.

Although this tension between freedom and focus is somewhat dependent on each student’s personal expectations and desires from the Public Communication major, this organizational paradox is clearly evident in certain responses which both praise PCOM for its freedom and then criticize it for its lack of focus. This was noted in a number of graduates’ responses:

- “Strengths are the variety of skills and topics covered. The freedom to explore different aspects of ‘Public Communication’... [A] weakness is the degree to which students are encouraged to explore the AMAZING variety of positions and jobs where these skills are applicable.”
- “The program has a wide variety of different classes which provides a good sampling of different communication means. However, I feel that the program lacked direction and guidance as a whole.”
- “I feel that there are a lot of resources and variety with the Public Communication major... Public Communication is pretty broad however, so it may help if there was a specific focus to narrow down students’ interests.”
- “The major wasn’t too specific, it was very open (this can also be a strength) but sometimes finding a job with a PCOM major is tough.”

Graduates appreciate both the freedom to explore as well as the ability to focus on a particular area. This tension can be caused by the expectations students have going into the Public Communication major. While students may want something more or something different from their education, a lack of clarity or regular communication regarding the faculty's objectives and definitions of Public Communication could contribute to this organizational paradox.

The second tension present in graduates' perceptions of Public Communication focused on experiential learning, specifically, service-learning and career advising. Some students gave high praise to the department's use of service learning projects as real-world experiences relevant to life outside college. Others reported a greater need for career advising, internships, and more concrete tools to help them find a career upon graduation.

One emphasis of the Public Communication and CDAE department as a whole is its emphasis on service-learning classes and large number of opportunities for applied work with local community partners on specific projects. This form of experiential learning helps students work "toward a common goal which transcend[s] disciplinary divisions" (Baker et al., 2009). Many graduates identified service-based learning as a strength in the program:

- "Few programs at UVM offer such strong experiential learning and PCOM students are at a distinct advantage in the job market as a result."
- "Service learning opportunities in many classes are a HUGE asset to success in the PCOM major."
- "[One strength would be] service learning--being able to work with a real business/community in order to create effective messaging for their target audience."
- "The strengths were the hands on work done with non-profit organizations in the Burlington Community."
- "Strength - SERVICE LEARNING, and I can't stress that enough."

These graduates appreciated the service-based learning present in Public Communication because it gave them the opportunity to step outside the classroom and experience first-hand some of the issues facing the local community. It provides students with experiences that can be extrapolated to a wide variety of job opportunities upon graduation.

The emphasis on experiential learning left other students feeling that they were missing out on more concrete career advising and traditional internship opportunities that would better prepare them for their professional pursuits. They argue that while the service learning opportunities allowed them to work with partners in the local community, but they did not help graduates decide on or prepare for a specific career. This concern is evident in a number of graduates responses:

- “From my experience I was not prepared well enough for a traditional professional atmosphere as my hands-on training focused too greatly on my service-learning project, which was essentially on a farm.”
- “I feel this major needed more emphasis on internships and real world experience.”
- “A weakness would be helping students be prepared for the workforce. You can be amazing in your major and do great in the service learning opportunities, but it’s not necessarily going to help you find a job.”
- “Paid internship opportunities and career placement issues in the field were issues I dealt with, leading me to have never begun work in my field of study.”
- “Weaknesses are a lacking in teaching real world work skills that are easily translated from the classroom to the office.”

Many of these graduates say that they would have liked more opportunities for traditional work experience as opposed to the community-based service learning offered by PCOM. They argue that although these service learning opportunities do not translate to a ‘real world’ work environment. Their

responses indicate the desire for a larger focus on internship opportunities that will help them achieve that specific goal.

The experiential learning tension also seems to arise from the nature of the Public Communication major. Its commitment to service-based learning is meant to provide students with an experience similar to what they might be able to expect when they enter the professional world. While a number of students appreciate this service-learning aspect for its ability to create a simulated, hands-on, work experience, others are not able to apply these opportunities to their professional desires. They seek more traditional career advising and internship experience that will translate easily and clearly into the professional world.

The final organizational paradox discovered from graduates responses deals more closely with their specific definitions of Public Communication. The tension arises from the relationship between messages senders and audiences. While some define PCOM using a systems (two-way) approach, where the person crafting the message should engage in an open conversation with the audience, others define it as a dissemination (one-way) approach that focuses on the most effective and strategic way to create a message that reaches an audience at large. Also known as the hypodermic needle model, this communication theory claims that messages have a direct, universal, and massive influence on malleable and impressionable audiences” (Greenberg & Salwen, 1996).

The first group sees Public Communication as creating an ongoing, co-constructed dialogue with the general public. It is their job to work with the community, more as equals, to foster a relationship and ensure that the messages being created are meant to produce outcomes that are community driven. This systems approach to Public Communication can be seen through a number of graduates’ responses:

- “Public Communication is the communication between people as equals. It is the study of the interactive system.”

- “This includes not only written and oral communications, but the concept of listening and understanding your audience prior to the delivery of your message as well.”
- “Critical analysis and management of social situations and media to produce an outcome that is community driven/focused in order to optimize productivity and maximize benefit.”
- “The study of communication between different people and cultures, and how we use that communication in our communities and beyond.”
- “Facilitating an open and ongoing conversation with/to your audience.”

These responses indicate an emphasis on listening and working *with* the community/audience instead of directing messages *at* the audience. They note that communication is a two-way street where both parties can learn something from the other. It still focuses on the delivery of the message, but it also makes sure to incorporate community member’s thoughts and ideas so it will be most effective with its intended audience.

The second group defines Public Communication using a dissemination (one-way) approach. These respondents still see the need for strategic and tailored messages, but see it more as their individual responsibility to create the message and make sure it reaches the intended audience through an approach similar to the hypodermic needle theory. There is less of a place for a dialogue with the public and their expertise gives them the knowledge they need to create and execute an effective message. This is illustrated in a number of graduates’ responses:

- “Studying the traditional and modern means of how strategic messages reach an audience.”
- “Public Communication is the study and practice of disseminating messages from the public sector to the community and key stakeholders.”
- “The ability to effectively speak to a broad group of people through various media tactics.”
- “Delivering information to large numbers of people, across any and all mediums, in a way that is clear, concise and effective.”

These responses define Public Communication from a more traditional communication perspective, emphasizing the ability to communicate with a large audience. Additionally, these respondents use words such as, “speak to”, “disseminate”, and “deliver” all illustrating a more one-way approach to the idea of communication with a group/audience.

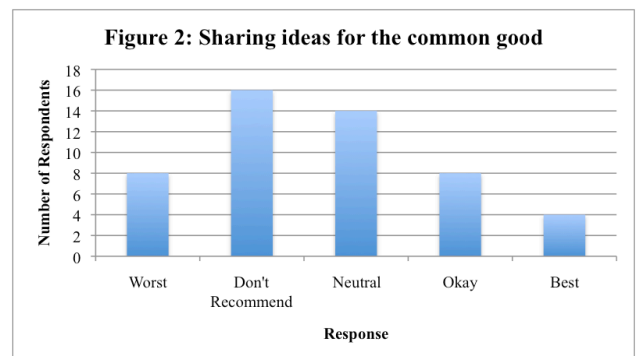
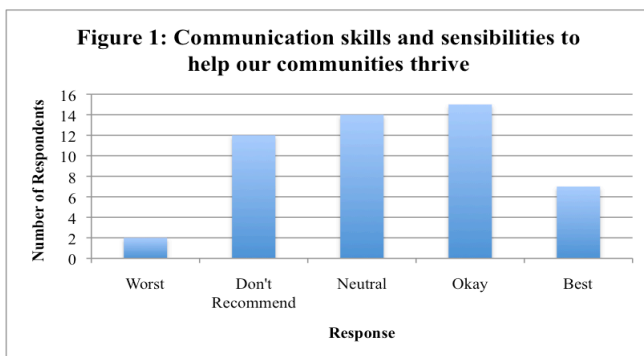
In conclusion, through these graduate responses, one can more clearly see the existence of these organizational paradoxes and how graduates struggle with them. The tension between freedom & focus, experiential learning & career advising, and one-way & two-way messaging are all present for graduates of Public Communication. It is worth noting though, that tensions like these within a program do not necessarily indicate a problem as current students are constantly learning about what they want out of their major and reflecting on how their education will or has help(ed) them. Eisenberg (1984), refers to this as strategic ambiguity and claims that it is beneficial to an organization, stating that it promotes diversity and facilitates change. However, the wide variety of responses in the survey does illustrate that the Public Communication department lacks cohesive messaging to its students and graduates. Through better understanding of these paradoxes and how graduates deal with their opposing forces, the department can better communicate with current students about how to balance each of them.

RQ2: What types of messages resonate with Public Communication alumni? To answer this question, I analyzed graduates’ responses to two survey questions. The questions regarded the currently endorsed PCOM learning objectives and a series of slogans developed using the faculty and staff survey.

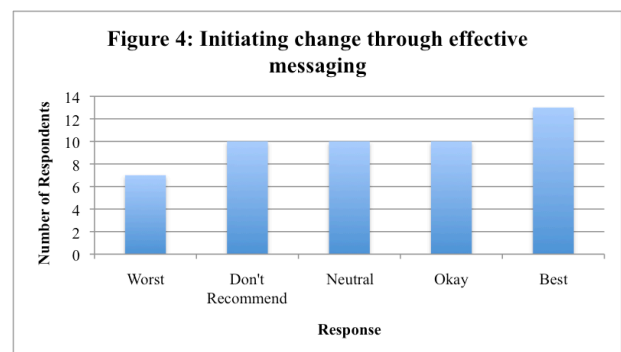
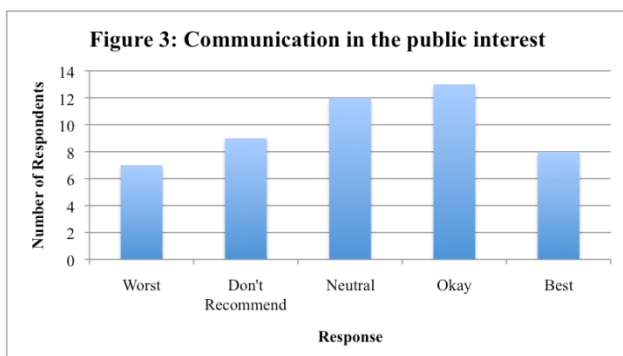
The first question asked students to what degree they agree or disagree with three different statements about the learning objectives associated with Public Communication. The first learning objective, “Helps students learn transdisciplinary theories, methods, and tools,” resonated well with students as 67% (n=34) agreed with the statement and 27% (n=14) strongly agreed, while only roughly 5% (n=3) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The second objective, “Communicate effectively using appropriate technologies...” showed similar results with 43% (n=22) of graduates agreeing and 47%

strongly agreeing. The final learning objective, “Engage in service learning opportunities...” showed the highest rate of agreement with 73% of respondents reporting they strongly agree and another 24% reporting they agree with the statement. With over 90% of graduates reporting some level of agreement with each learning objective, it shows that the Public Communication program is achieving its learning objectives.

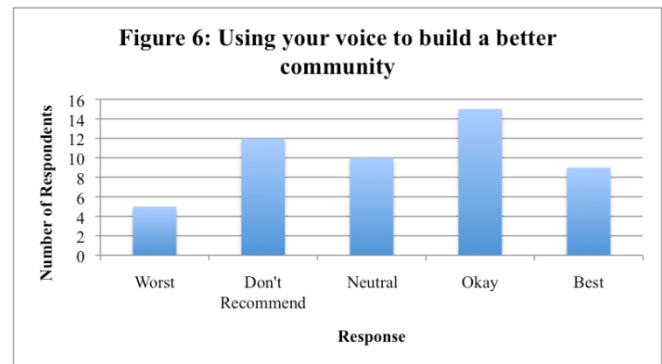
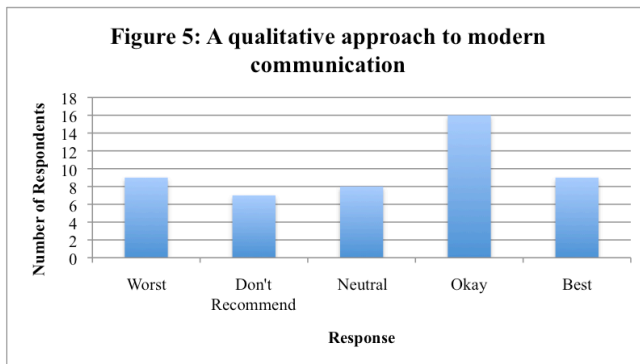
The second survey question analyzed to respond to this research question asked graduates to rank a series of six slogans on a scale from one to five, with one being ‘worst’, two being ‘I do not recommend’, three being ‘neutral’, four being ‘okay’, and five being ‘best’. The first slogan, “Communication skills and sensibilities to help our communities thrive,” (Figure 1) showed fairly



neutral results with a relatively normal distribution as 82% (n=41) of responses were in the ‘I do not recommend’ to ‘okay’ range with a fairly even distribution between each. The second slogan, “Sharing ideas for the common good,” (Figure 2) showed a slightly lower level of resonance with graduates as over 75% (n=38) of responses were in the ‘worst’ to ‘neutral’ range. Additionally, 32% (n=16) of



respondents ranked this slogan as ‘I do not recommend’, which ties for the single highest percentage for any particular category among all six slogans. The next slogan, “Communication in the public interest,” (Figure 3) shows roughly opposite results from the second slogan with two-thirds (n=32) of responses in the ‘neutral’ to ‘best’ range. These responses show a slight left skew, which indicates a higher level of resonance with graduates. The fourth slogan, “Initiating change through effective messaging,” (Figure 4) also has a fairly even distribution with the responses ‘I do not recommend’ through ‘okay’ each receiving exactly 20% (n=10). However, responses for this slogan also possess a slight left skew as 26% (n=13) of respondents indicated it as the ‘best’ slogan, which is 8% higher than the ‘best’ responses for



any other slogan. The fifth slogan, “A qualitative approach to modern communication,” (Figure 5) also has a fairly normal distribution of responses. With the exception of ‘okay’ at 33% (n=16), the four other responses are all within the four percentage points of each other (14%-18%). The high number of okay responses does give this slogan a very slight left skew. The final slogan, “Using your voice to build a better community,” (Figure 6) has a slightly more evident left skew as 33% (n=17) of responses in the ‘worst’ to ‘I do not recommend’, 20% (n=10) ‘neutral’, and 47% (n=24) in the ‘okay’ to ‘best’ range. This increase in responses throughout the scale (1-5) demonstrates a higher level of resonance with graduates.

After reviewing the responses from graduates for each slogan, a couple slogans seem to resonate more strongly with graduates. One slogan that seemed to stand out would be, “Initiating change through effective messaging.” Although this slogan has an equal number of ‘I do not recommend’, ‘neutral’, and

'okay' responses, it also clearly has a left skew and has the highest percent (26%) of 'best' responses. Additionally, the slogan, "Using your voice to build a better community" seems to resonate well with graduates as 47% (n=24) responded positively (okay - best), while only 33% responded negatively (worst – I do not recommend).

Ultimately, the learning objectives resonate well with students as over 90% of graduates reported some level of agreement with each of the three objectives. The messaging of the PCOM department through its learning objectives accurately represents what students will learn while studying Public Communication. The slogans tested in the survey do not identify a clear favorite, but the two outlined above appear to be generally favored over the rest. It is worth noting that both of the slogans that tested the best include the idea of messaging to create change. This is a theme that appears to resonate strongly with Public Communication graduates.

RQ 3. What career outcomes are associated with a degree in PCOM? This final research question looks at post-baccalaureate experiences of PCOM graduates. The responses could also be understood as career expectations that current students in Public Communication can expect upon graduation. To analyze this question, I looked at graduates responses to a number of survey questions including how long it took to find a job after graduation, current industry of employment, salary expectations, social responsibility of employers, and non-profit versus for-profit.

The first question asked students how long it took them to find a career relevant job after graduation. If the respondent attended a graduate school or volunteer program directly after school they were asked to include that in their response and answer the question from the time they completed that graduate/volunteer program. The responses show that 81% (n=39) of graduates were able to find a job within eight months of graduation and 36% (n=14) of graduates obtained a career relevant job prior to graduating. Of the total respondents for this question (N=48), only one is currently unemployed.

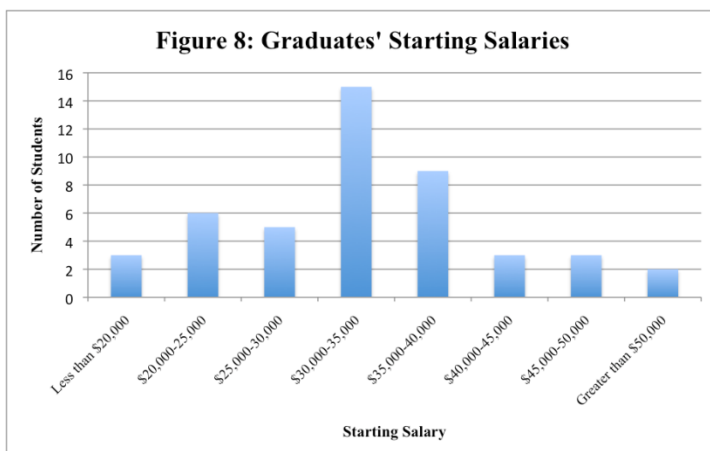
The second survey question looking at career expectations asked graduates to share in which industry they are currently employed. They were given a list of 15 choices with an ‘other’ option to write in the industry if it was not listed. The results show a strong tendency for graduates to enter careers in advertising/marketing as 42% (n=21) of respondents indicated that as their industry of employment. The next most popular industry for PCOM graduates was event planning with 6% (n=3) of graduates working in that industry. After that, the results indicate two people working in the sales, entertainment, media management, continuing education, and merchandise industries. A complete table of career fields can be found below in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Industry	Number of Graduates
Advertising/Marketing	21
Sales	2
Internet Marketing Search Engine Optimization	1
Membership Services	1
Higher Education	1
Public Relations	1
Journalism	1
Service Position	1
Political Campaign	1

Continuing Education	2
Retail Project Management	1
Fashion Merchandise	2
Event Planning	3
Entertainment	2
Website Editor	1
Small Business Owner	1
Social Service Agency	1
Media Management	2
Communication Coordinator	1

The third part of evaluating career expectations for Public Communication graduates looks at starting salaries. The question broke down salaries in \$5,000 increments starting from less than \$20,000 and ranging to greater than \$50,000. Figure 8 illustrated below shows the breakdown of graduates’

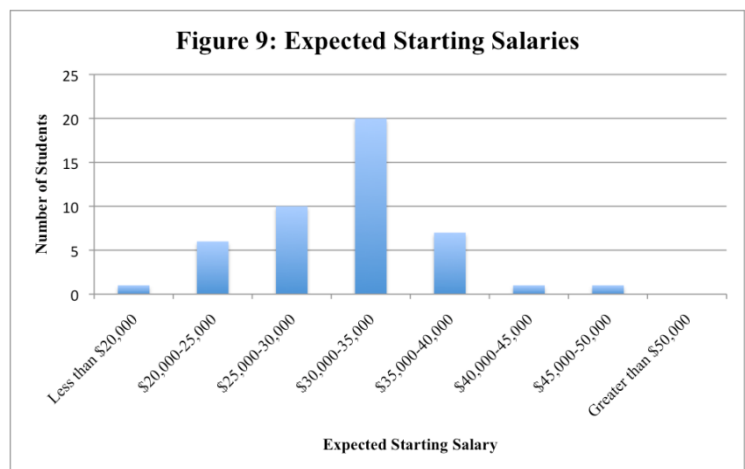


starting salaries. The majority of graduates’ (n=24) reported their starting salaries as falling into the \$30,000-\$40,000. There are slightly more graduates (n=14) that started under the \$30,000 - \$40,000 range than those who had

starting salaries making more than that (n=8). It is important to note that these are participants reported starting salaries, which may have changed over time due to inflation.

Additionally, graduates were asked what they would expect someone's starting salary in their industry if the student were to enter the workforce today. The results, illustrated in Figure 9, show a

fairly similar breakdown to the results of graduates' actual starting salaries, shown in Figure 8. Similar to graduates' actual starting salaries, the highest expected starting salary falls in the \$30,000 - \$35,000 range (n=20). However, more graduates' expect starting salaries in their industry (n=10) to be in the



\$25,000 - \$30,000 range than the \$35,000 - \$40,000 range (n=7). This contrasts the results of graduates' actual starting salaries in Figure 8 and shows expected starting salaries overall to be slightly lower than graduates' actual starting salaries. The final survey questions used to find out about career expectations for Public Communication graduates explored graduates place of employment, including who went on to work for socially responsible companies as well as how many work at for-profit versus non-profit companies. The number of graduates who reported that their employer is socially responsible (n=33) is greater than those who reported their employer to be not socially responsible (n=5). Additionally, 67% (n=30) reported the company they work for to be for-profit, while 20% (n=9) work for non-profit organizations and 13% (n= 6) responded 'other' reporting positions at universities and government institutions.

Overall, the results show that graduates of Public Communication enter a variety of different professions, with a strong emphasis on the advertising/marketing industry. Graduates are able to find a job fairly quickly after graduation, as 81% of survey respondents were able to find a job within 8 months

of graduating. Additionally, only one graduate reported being currently unemployed, which is impressive as 49% of all those who have graduated college since 2006 do not currently have full-time jobs (Stone, Van Horn, & Zukin, 2012). Graduates' starting salaries are slightly below the national average as 52% of graduates reported starting salaries between \$30,000 and \$40,000. The national average starting salary is \$44,259, according to a 2012 survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (Fastenberg, 2012).

Discussion

From the data, a number of conclusions can be made about the Public Communication program and its graduates. First, through graduates' definitions of PCOM and identification of strengths & weaknesses within the program, one can identify the organizational paradoxes present in the program, which has implications on organizational identity. Additionally, this research helps understand the messages that resonate most with Public Communication alumni and the career expectations for graduates of the program. This section will discuss some of the scholarly and practical contributions derived from this research as well as identify a few limitations and suggest ideas for future research in the field.

Scholarly Contributions

This research presents scholarly contributions both specific to Public Communication programs as well as the academic setting at large. The first contribution is to organizational paradoxes in the higher education system. Although organizational paradoxes are well recognized as a scholarly concept (Clegg, 2002; Ford & Backoff, 1988), there is very little literature present on their presence and effect on graduates of higher education programs. Kolb (1984) explains the merits of experiential learning in higher education and presents the tension between traditional classroom learning and this idea of experiential learning. This research takes an in-depth look at the organizational paradoxes within an undergraduate major and how its graduates' struggle with these tensions as they pursue their

professional goals. The tensions of freedom versus focus and experiential learning versus career advising identified in this research can be easily applied to many undergraduate programs. This research on alumni will help the scholarly discussion about organizational paradoxes in higher education because it identifies a number of the tensions present for graduates, who are key stakeholders in the organizational identity of higher education programs. By better understanding how these organizational paradoxes affect alumni, departments will be able to better tailor their messaging and advising efforts to help people navigate these tensions more smoothly.

The career outcomes identified in this research also provides significant new literature on how graduates are using their Public Communication degrees. Because the Public Communication major is only six years old here at UVM, there is not much existing data on how long it takes PCOM graduates to get a job, what types of jobs they are getting, or what expected salaries might be. This research provides that information as well as data about how many graduates are working for non-profit versus for-profit organizations and how many consider their employer to be socially responsible. And although these data are only collected from graduates of Public Communication at UVM, similar programs at other universities could use the data to identify potential career paths for people with degrees in Public Communication.

Practical Contributions

Along with the scholarly contributions derived from this research, one can also identify a number of practical contributions for current students, graduates, and faculty of Public Communication. The paradoxes identified in graduates' survey responses helps identify some of the tensions present in the academic setting. These responses can also be turned into a practical contribution to support CDAE's organizational identity. For example, if PCOM faculty understand these tensions, they can identify ways to help students manage them through student advising and providing a more explicit definition of Public Communication to students early on in the program. Further, identifying the existence of these

tensions with students could also help as they could more easily recognize and navigate them with the assistance of faculty members. It is important to note that the presence of tensions can often be good for an organization because instead of exploring either/or tradeoffs, a paradox perspective creates both/and opportunities, which allows for dynamic and adaptive organizations (Clegg, Cuhna, & Cuhna, 2002). CDAE faculty and staff should help students manage tensions; rather than seek to remove tensions.

Another practical contribution from this research could be the recommendation of a new slogan for the program that resonates more with students and graduates. As outlined in the literature review, one point of communications audits is “to reveal gaps in the communication process, and to provide suggestions for improvement” (Henderson, 2005, p. 312). The survey identified a number of potential slogans and gauged the degree to which graduates agreed or disagreed with each slogan. While there was no unanimous favorite among graduates’ responses, there were a couple that resonated more strongly with graduates. The two that tested most positively were, “Initiating change through effective messaging,” and “Using your voice to build a better community.” With these data, the Public Communication department could more easily create a new slogan that resonates clearly with students and graduates of PCOM.

Other practical contributions from the research can be made that were not presented in this paper. One of the survey questions asked graduates to rank the core classes in the Public Communication curriculum on a scale from one to five with one being least helpful and five being most helpful. Using these data, the Public Communication department could better identify, which classes prove most helpful to graduates in their careers and which classes may not be as effective. Additionally, another survey question asked graduates to identify any skill sets or concepts missing from the Public Communication program. These responses could be used to include more skills or concepts in PCOM classes that graduates are using in their current careers and professions.

Finally, one final practical contribution that can be made is to provide graduates and students with the findings from this research. In my requests for graduates to complete the survey, both via email and LinkedIn, I told graduates to reply if they would like a copy of the paper upon my completion. Those who requested to see the research will receive a copy of the findings. Additionally, I will make the research readily available to any of CDAE's current students, graduates, faculty, or staff who wish to see it. For graduates, this will show what others are doing with the same degree. For students, it will help them identify the tensions present in the major as well as provide a snapshot of career expectations for when they graduate.

Limitations

While this study offers many contributions, I realize that this study is not without certain limitations. First, the study sample size fell at the low-end of what is considered to be statistically significant. I was only provided with 120 working emails of PCOM alumni although the program has 201 current graduates.

Additionally, searching for graduates through LinkedIn proved useful, but still did not provide a complete list of Public Communication graduates. However, after this research we have emails and connections with many of the current alumni that could prove helpful in future research efforts. Further, the research only looked at graduates of Public Communication at the University of Vermont. Although there are few universities with programs like Public Communication, I did not survey graduates of American University's Public Communication major or other similar programs. This limits the study's ability to be generalized on a broader spectrum. However, the specificity of this research does provide PCOM at the University of Vermont with information that can be directly applied to the program. It can help faculty and staff in the department see exactly where these organizational paradoxes exist and identify potential solutions to ease these tensions.

Finally, the research was only conducted on graduates of Public Communication in the CDAE department. The survey could have been slightly altered and given to graduates of all majors in the CDAE department to better understand how these paradoxes fit in the CDAE department as a whole and how graduates of other majors in CDAE are using their degrees.

Future Research

Upon analysis and reflection of this research, a number of ideas for future research opportunities arise. As mentioned above, one question asked graduates to identify any skill sets or concepts missing from the PCOM curriculum that would have been helpful to know for their current profession. This question could be expanded for future research about the skill sets necessary for Public Communication graduates. Because CDAE is a very transdisciplinary department, there are a wide variety of skills and concepts taught to students throughout the program. One area for future research could be to investigate which of these skills are most helpful or least helpful for graduates in their careers. Similarly, by identifying these communication skills, the faculty could then work to replace classes or lessons oriented toward less than helpful skills with skills and concepts graduates do use that are not taught as much in the current Public Communication curriculum.

Another area for future research could identify to what degree organizational identity is correlated with other variables, including alumni's willingness to give back to the program, whether it be time, money, student mentoring, guest lecturing, or another form. This could be beneficial because the department would be able to see what they need to do to build stronger organizational identity with alumni and how directly that correlates to those alumni giving back to the program and current student development.

The final suggestion for future research would be to conduct surveys with current students. Many of the same survey questions given to graduates regarding definitions of PCOM, strengths and weaknesses of the program, and messages could be given to current students as well. While it is helpful

to research graduates who have been removed from the program for some amount of time and have the perspective of entering the workforce, it would also be very helpful to see the thoughts of those who are currently enrolled and how they are dealing with some of the tensions present in the program.

Concluding Thoughts

Through this research, I hope to provide the Public Communication program at UVM with a variety of information about how its graduates are using their degrees as well as how they view the program overall. I have confidence that the identification of the organizational paradoxes present in PCOM will give students, graduates, and faculty a more clear understanding of the program and how to better navigate these tensions throughout their time in the program. Additionally, I believe that the identification of how current students are using their degrees will help provide faculty the information to better tailor the program as well as provide current students an idea of some career choices available to them upon graduation. Ultimately, this research sheds light on Public Communication and helps give more clarity as to the purpose and direction of the program as a whole.

Growth as a Communicator

Through this research, I gained a variety of skills to help my development as a communicator both personally and professionally. I learned how to conduct research using surveys, analyze data both qualitatively and quantitatively, and present my findings effectively. My growth as a communicator from this research comes primarily from the connections I made with faculty/staff at UVM, graduates of Public Communication, and current students. Throughout the project, I met with members of Career Services, Alumni Relations, Information Technology, and multiple faculty in the Public Communication department. Each person shed light on my research from a different perspective that proved both necessary and valuable.

Additionally, each step of the research process helped to strengthen my abilities as a communicator. The creation of surveys for faculty and graduates helped teach me how to tailor

questions in order to effectively gather useful information from respondents. And when only a few graduates responded to my initial email requests to complete the survey, I learned how to adapt my communication strategy to best connect with graduates and increase my survey response rate. Through analysis and presentation of my research, I gained valuable information about communication theories and concepts that I was previously unaware of. Most notably, I learned about the idea of organizational paradoxes and how they are present in academic settings, specifically looking at their effect on Public Communication at UVM. Further, I learned that the presence of these paradoxes is not inherently negative for an organization, and when managed correctly, can be a dynamic component of the learning process. My growth as a communicator also comes from learning how to present research in a professional manner that not only explains my personal findings, but also contributes to the larger discussion that other researchers can benefit from.

Ultimately, this research started as a chore and ended as an opportunity. I am grateful for everyone who provided their time and expertise to help create and administer this research as well as everyone who took the time to contribute their thoughts and responses. As a communicator, it is integral that we see the value in every person, whether it be for a reflection of their time at UVM or how best to use an online survey tool. I learned the importance of this concept throughout my research and am extremely thankful for the connections I formed throughout this process.

References

- Bakal, C. (1979). *Charity USA: An Investigation into the hidden world of the multi-billion dollar industry*. New York; Times Books.
- Baker, D., Koliba, C., Kolodinsky, J., Liang, K., McMahon, E., Patterson, T., & Wang, Q. (2009). Moving toward a transdisciplinary approach in the land-grant system: A case study. *NACTA Journal*, 53(2), 34-42.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Cameron, K. S. (1986). Effectiveness as paradox: Consensus and conflict in conceptions of organizational effectiveness. *Management Science*, 32(5), 539-553.
- Clark, B. R. (1972). 'The organizational saga in higher education', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17, 178-184.
- Clegg, S. R. (2002). General Introduction In S. R. Clegg (Ed.), *Management and organization paradoxes* (1-10). Amsterdam: John Benjamins B.V.
- Clegg, S. R., Cuhna, J. V., & Cuhna, M. P. (2002). Management paradoxes: A relational view. *Human Relations*, 55(5), 483-503.
- Conway, T., Mackay, S., & Yorke, D. (1994). Strategic planning in higher education: Who are the customers. *International Journal of Educational Management* 8(6), 29-36.
- Doorley, J., & Garcia, H. F. (2006). *Reputation management: The key to successful public relations and corporate communication*. New York: Routledge.

- Dorschner, C. (2009, March 15). New public communication major attracts interest. Retrieved from <http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmpr/?Page=article.php&id=1578>
- Edgar, T., & Hyde, J.N. (2005). An alumni-based evaluation of graduate training in health communication: results of a survey on careers, salaries, competencies, and emerging trends. *Journal of Health Communication* 10(1), 5-25.
- Eisenberg, E. M. (1984). Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication. *Communication monographs*, 51(3), 227-242.
- Fastenberg, D. (2012, September 6). Average Starting Salary For 2012 College Grads: \$44,259. *AOL Jobs*. Retrieved from <http://jobs.aol.com/articles/2012/09/06/2012s-college-grads-start-careers-with-higher-salaries/>
- Ford, J., & Backoff, R. (1988). *Organizational change in and out of dualities and paradox*. In R. Quinn, & K. Cameron (Eds.), *Paradox and transformation: Toward a theory of change in organization and management* (81-121). Cambridge: Ballinger.
- Greenberg, B. S., & Salwen, M. B. (1996). Mass communication theory and research: Concepts and models. In M.B. Salwen & D.W. Stacks (Eds.), *An integrated approach to communication theory and research* (63-78). New York: Routledge.
- Hamilton, M. B. (2003). *Online survey response rates and times: Background and guidance for industry*. Lake Oswego: Tercent, Inc. Retrieved April 4, 2013 from http://www.supersurvey.com/papers/supersurvey_white_paper_response_rates.pdf
- Hargie, O., & Tourish, D. (2009). *Auditing organizational communication: A handbook of research, theory and practice*. New York: Routledge.

- Henderson, J. (2005) Evaluating public relations effectiveness in a health care setting: The identification of communication assets and liabilities via a communication audit. *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration*, 2(2), 282-322.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (Vol. 1). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Kraut, R. E., Fish, R. S., Root, R. W., & Chalfonte, B. L. (1990). Informal communication in organizations: Form, function, and technology. In *Human reactions to technology: Claremont symposium on applied social psychology*(pp. 145-199). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lerpold, L. (2007). *Organizational identity in practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lovelock, C.H., & Rothschild, M.L. (1980). Uses, abuses and misuses of marketing in higher education. *Marketing in college admissions: A broadening of perspectives*. The College Board, New York, NY.
- Mael, F., & Ashforth, B.E. (1992). Alumni and their alma mater: A partial test of the reformulated model of organizational identification. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 13(2), 103-23.
- Pearce, J. A. (1982). The company mission as a strategic tool. *Sloan Management Review*, 23(3), 15-24.
- Ransdell, G. A. (1986). Understanding professional roles and program mission. *Handbook of institutional advancement* (Vols. 2). (374-377). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Smith, W. K., & Lewis, M. W. (2011). Toward a theory of paradox: A dynamic equilibrium model of organizing. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), 381-403.

Stone, C., Van Horn, C., & Zukin, C. (2012). Chasing the American dream: Recent college graduates and the great recession. *John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development*. Retrieved from http://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/content/Chasing_American_Dream_Report.pdf

University of Vermont. (2011). *Major: Public Communication (PCOM)*. Retrieved from <http://www.uvm.edu/~cdae/undergraduate/PCom/PComMajor.pdf>

University of Vermont. (2013). *Community Development and Applied Economics: Public Communication*. Retrieved from <http://www.uvm.edu/~cdae/?Page=undergraduatePCOM.html&SM=submenus/undersubmenu.html>

Weick, K. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Wickson, F., Carew, A.L., & Russell, A.W. (2006). Transdisciplinary research: Characteristics, quandaries and quality. *Futures*, 38(9), 1046-1059.

Appendix A

Public Communication Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this short survey. By doing so, you are helping me complete my Senior Honors Thesis and graduate! It would be most helpful if you could complete this paper survey and put it in an envelope on Tina Haskins' desk or complete the online survey by following the link provided to you by email.

Please complete the survey by 5pm on Friday November 9th.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me (Sam Patterson, sjpatter@uvm.edu) or my thesis advisor (Sarah Heiss, sheiss@uvm.edu).

INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer the following questions as you would to a current/prospective student studying Public Communication.

What is your personal definition of Public Communication?

What messages do you regularly tell students considering a Public Communication degree?

Is there a simple phrase or slogan you tell students considering a Public Communication degree? What is it, and what does it mean?

What main outcomes do you regularly tell students they can expect from obtaining a Public Communication degree?

What are three words you most closely associate with Public Communication

INSTRUCTIONS: Now please tell me a little bit about yourself.

I'm a _____.

Assistant Faculty

Associate Faculty

- Full Faculty
- Lecturer
- Adjunct Faculty

- Administrator
- Staff
- Other: _____

My main interaction with PCOM majors is through...

- Courses I Teach
- Advising Sessions
- Research Projects
- Work/Internship Interactions
- Teaching Assistantships
- Casual Conversations on Campus
- I never interact with PCOM majors
- Other: _____

I mainly teach CDAE courses in...

- Community and International Development
- Public Communication
- Community Entrepreneurship
- Master's of Public Administration
- Masters of Community Development and Applied Economics
- I don't teach within any of these programs
- Other: _____

Please write your last name to help me track survey completion: _____

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY.
PLEASE RETURN TO TINA HASKINS BY NOV. 9**

Appendix B

Public Communication Graduates

Thank you and welcome to the survey for graduates of Public Communication at UVM. This short survey (roughly 5-7 minutes) will help us gain a better understanding of how Public Communication graduates are using their degrees and to identify a common message behind the Public Communication major at the University of Vermont.

There are 23 questions in this survey

Identifying Public Communication

1 [G1Q1] 1. What is your definition of Public Communication?

Please write your answer here:

2 [G1Q2]

3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Public Communication at UVM:

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Helps students learn trans-disciplinary theories, methods, and tools in preparation for supporting sustainable and ethical community-based public policies and communications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Communicate

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

effectively using appropriate technologies and employing written, oral, and visual techniques

Engage in service learning opportunities applying public policy theories and communication skills in the public interest

3 [G1Q3]

4. If the Public Communication major were to consider a new slogan, which slogan do you think would be best?

1 = Worst

2 = I do not recommend

3 = Neutral

4 = Okay

5 = Best

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

1 2 3 4 5

Communication skills and sensibilities to help our communities thrive

	1	2	3	4	5
Sharing ideas for the common good	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication in the public interest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Initiating change through effective messaging	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A qualitative approach to modern communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using your voice to build a better community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4 [G1Q4] To wrap up this section, what do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the Public Communication major at UVM?

Please write your answer here:

Current Professional Standing

5 [G2Q1]

How long after graduation did you start your first career-relevant job?

If you attended a graduate school or volunteer program before seeking a job, please state for how long in the comment box below and answer the question from the time that program was completed.

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- I had a job during school which continued after graduation
- I obtained a job prior to graduation
- I obtained a job less than two months after graduation
- I obtained a job within two to three months after graduation
- I obtained a job within four to eight months after graduation
- I obtained a job nine or more months after graduation
- I had a job, but am currently unemployed (and seeking employment)

- I have not yet obtained a job and am currently seeking one
 - I am not employed but am NOT currently seeking employment
- Make a comment on your choice here:

6 [G2Q2]In what industry are you currently employed?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Advertising/Marketing
- Public Relations
- Corporate Communication
- Communication Planning
- Event Planning
- Communication Coordinator/Director
- Media Management
- Human Resources
- Strategic Planning
- Training and Consulting
- Media Literacy
- Entertainment
- Journalism
- Continuing Education
- Service Position (Peace Corp, Teach For America, etc.)
- Other

7 [G2Q3]My current employer would be considered socially responsible:

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
- No

8 [G2Q4]My current employer is:

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- non-profit organization
- for profit organization
- Government
- Other

9 [G2Q5] In what state are you currently employed?

Please write your answer here:

10 [G2Q6]

What would you tell a graduating PCOM student to expect as a starting salary for someone in your industry today?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- less than \$20,000
- \$20,000 - \$25,000
- \$25,000 - \$30,000
- \$30,000 - \$35,000
- \$35,000 - \$40,000
- \$40,000 - \$45,000
- \$45,000 - \$50,000
- Greater than \$50,000

11 [G2Q7] What was the annual starting salary for your job?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- less than \$20,000
- \$20,000 - \$25,000
- \$25,000 - \$30,000
- \$30,000 - \$35,000
- \$35,000 - \$40,000
- \$40,000 - \$45,000
- \$45,000 - \$50,000

- Greater than \$50,000
- 12 [G2Q8]What is your current salary?**
Please choose **only one** of the following:

- \$20,000 - \$25,000
- \$25,000 - \$30,000
- \$30,000 - \$35,000
- \$35,000 - \$40,000
- \$40,000 - \$45,000
- \$45,000 - \$50,000
- \$50,000 - \$55,000
- \$55,000 - \$60,000
- \$60,000 - \$65,000
- \$65,000 - \$70,000
- \$70,000 - \$75,000
- \$75,000 - \$80,000
- \$80,000 - \$85,000
- \$85,000 - \$90,000
- \$90,000 - \$95,000
- \$95,000 - \$100,000
- Greater than \$100,000

13 [G2Q9]

To what extent do each of the following topics/skill sets taught in CDAE HELP you in your current job?

1 = Not at all helpful

10 = Most helpful

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Trans-disciplinary theories of communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Methods, and tools in preparation for supporting sustainable and ethical community-based public policies and communications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicate effectively using appropriate technologies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employing visual techniques to facilitate communicating messages effectively	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employing oral techniques to facilitate communicating messages effectively	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employing written techniques to facilitate communicating messages effectively	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engage in service learning opportunities applying public policy theories and communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14 [G2Q10]

Were there any skill sets/concepts missing from the list above that you feel would have been helpful in your current profession?

Please write your answer(s) here:

-
-

• **15 [G2Q11]**

To what extent did the following classes in the Public Communication curriculum prove relevant or helpful in your current professional experience?

1 = Not at all helpful

5 = Most helpful

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	1	2	3	4	5
CDAE 002 World Food, Population, & Development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CDAE 015 Visual Communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CDAE 061 Community Development Economics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CDAE 102 Sustainable Community Development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CDAE 127 Consumers, Markets, and Public Policy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CDAE 250 Applied Research Methods	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CDAE 024 Fundamentals of Public Communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CDAE 129 Communication Law	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CDAE 120 Strategic Writing for Public Communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CDAE 195 Writing Across the Media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CDAE 124 Public Communication Media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
PA 206 Introduction to Contemporary Public Affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CDAE 295 Public Communication Capstone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	1	2	3	4	5
Special Topics in Public Communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Demographics

16 [G3Q1] In what year did you start at UVM?

Please write your answer here:

17 [G3Q2] What was your year of graduation?

Please write your answer here:

18 [G3Q3] In what year did you start the Public Communication major?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

19 [G3Q4] What was your graduating GPA?

Please write your answer here:

20 [G3Q5] What is your gender?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Male
- Female
- Transgender

21 [G3Q6] Please specify your ethnicity

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Hispanic or Latino
- Not Hispanic or Latino

22 [G3Q7] Please specify your race:

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- American Indian

- Asian
- Black or African-American
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White

23 [G3Q8]In what year were you born?

Please write your answer here:

Thank you so much for your participation in this survey! If you would like to receive information about the results of this research, please let me know via email at sjpatter@uvm.edu.

31.12.1969 – 19:00

Submit your survey.

Thank you for completing this survey.