Report of the Task Force on Journal Affiliation
Public Relations Division Business Meeting
International Communication Association
5 to 6:15 p.m. Sunday, 28 May 2017
Hilton San Diego Bayfront, 3, Aqua Salon AB

Committee Members:
Dean Kruckeberg, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA, Chair
Oyvind Ihlen, University of Oslo, NORWAY
Anne Lane, Queensland University of Technology, AUSTRALIA
David McKie, University of Waikato, NEW ZEALAND
Michael Kent, University of Tennessee Knoxville, USA
Candace White, University of Tennessee Knoxville, USA

Mission/Mandate:
1) To identify, review, and assess international journals having a peer-review system that publish public relations scholarship
2) To request information on publishing contract conditions and possible conference support for the journals to be selected as most relevant
3) To evaluate publishers’ proposals and to provide a written recommendation for the top 3 journals that can address the Division’s publishing needs.

Problem/Situation Analysis:
A significant number of ICA PRD members believe that the Division needs a journal that provides a broad understanding of public relations research and practice, including in countries that identify its general role and function as strategic communication, corporate communication, and similar terms.

Reasons include:

- Limited number of existing publishing venues that appreciate and publish public relations scholarship.
- Existing public relations journals are quantitatively oriented, which is problematic for PRD members who are qualitative scholars and for those who experiment with unconventional methods.
- ICA’s main journals do not provide visibility and recognition of public relations scholarship.
- Few PRD members are represented on the editorial boards of ICA’s main journals.
- High-quality submissions to the conference programs would be incentivized, because a journal could publish the best conference papers (although PRD could argue for a special issue of the main journals, such as Euprera is doing with JCOM, CSR communication conference is doing with Corporate Communication: An International Journal, and the Bledcom conference is doing with PRR.
- Future generations of scholars need more support in publishing venues, identity formation, and affiliation.
- Possible financial support could be provided by a journal publisher for PRD activities, including travel grants for students.
- Because PRD is multidisciplinary and explorative as a discipline, its accepted papers extend beyond a narrow definition of public relations. This range includes public relations, advertising, marketing, organizational communication, health, environment, and political communication. Although *International Journal of Strategic Communication* offers this multi-disciplinary range, PRD must reflect on the identity of the profession, how it has evolved, and how we want to strengthen it. A journal is a strong brand symbol.

This journal should also be receptive to research in public relations’ sub-areas, for example, crisis/risk communication, social media communication, CSR communication, political public relations, and public diplomacy. The journal should consider for publication manuscripts that are conceptual, theoretical, and empirical and that use a range of research methods, including qualitative, quantitative, mix-methods, and innovative approaches. Importantly, this journal must be international in scope, both in the range of scholars who submit manuscripts to be refereed and in the journal’s topics.

While being as inclusive as possible, this journal must be highly respected as a publication venue both by scholars and their institutions. Furthermore, a global market must exist for this peer-reviewed scholarly publication. Editorial criteria must position this journal beyond an assumed international scope and ecumenical perspective, based on the missions of ICA, its PRD, and its members own scholarly goals?

It must be determined and agreed-upon how this journal would be positioned beyond a presumptive emphasis on international research questions and sites. ICA PRD must address what would make ICA PRD’s affiliated journal different from other journals, if at all?

**Decision to be Made:**
Does ICA PRD want an affiliation with a journal, either an existing journal or a new one, based on the perceived advantages and disadvantages and the desirability or non-desirability of that decision?

**OPTION 1: Do not attempt to align with existing journal or to initiate new journal:**

**Thoughts on no attempt at affiliation or creation of a new journal:**

No investment of work and resources would be required from PRD.

**Advantages:**
It is questionable whether PRD papers would/could be automatically accepted, fast-tracked, or given priority for publication in an existing or newly initiated journal, and the implications of such acceptance must be considered for the quality and rigor of the journal’s peer-review system and for the journal? Or, would conference papers be subject to another round of review, and, if so, why have a “special arrangement” with a journal? Why not just submit to any journal just as with any other article? How would PRD be guaranteed to benefit from this affiliation with an existing or newly initiated journal? What benefit is it for Division members or for a journal, the latter which assuredly will have plenty of submissions?
Disadvantages:
The perceived benefits of a journal affiliated will not be realized.

OPTION 2: Align with an existing journal:
If the Division wants an affiliation with an existing journal, which ones are preferred?

Representative list of English-language journals in public relations and in related areas
(Some are not mainstream public relations journals or are not wholly focused on public relations; also, Teaching Public Relations is a pedagogical journal, and Case Studies in Strategic Communication is focused on case studies):

U.S.-based:
- Case Studies in Strategic Communication
- Public Relations Journal
- Public Relations Review
- Teaching Public Relations

Non-U.S.-based:
- Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal (Australia)
- Corporate Communications: An International Journal (UK)
- International Journal of Strategic communication (UK)
- PRism (New Zealand)
- Public Relations Inquiry (UK)
- Journal of Communication Management (UK)

From three databases (Academic Search Complete, Communication and Mass Media Complete, and Business Source Complete) for peer-reviewed articles using the search term “public relations,” journals that had at least 100 hits:
- American Journal of Public Health
- European Journal of Marketing
- Health Communication
- International Journal of Advertising
- Journal of Advertising
- Journal of Business Communication
- Journal of Business Ethics
- Journal of Hospital Marketing & Public Relations
- Journal of International Affairs
- Journal of Marketing
- Journal of Mass Media Ethics
- Journal of Public Affairs
- Journal of Promotion Management
- Journalism and Mass Communication Educator
- Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly
- Journalism Studies
- Public Opinion Inquiry
- Strategic Communication Management
Thoughts on an existing journal:
What can we offer that could incentivize an existing journal to align with the PR division?

Advantages:
- Impact factor is already established

Disadvantages:
- Journals are in the business of making money, and there is little incentive for a journal to align with a professional association.
- Scholarly associations have little power over existing journals and may not be interested in periodically rotating editors or in addressing other preferences of these associations.
- Journals with specific foci limit options for publishing.
- One might argue that there are only two strictly PR journals (JPRR, PRR), constraining opportunities and possibilities; thus, there may be no suitable and appropriate existing journals at all. JPRR has an affiliation with AEJMC PRD, and it is understood that PRR doesn’t want an affiliation. Others are too narrow in scope.
- Aligning with a new journal only solves short-term issues.

It is understood that Public Relations Review is not amenable to affiliation, and Division members have criticized Public Relation Inquiry for a lack of breadth and scope, with which at least one committee member disagrees. Journals gain little by creating a relationship with a professional association or division, and they do not want such affiliation; in contrast, professional/scholarly associations usually want oversight and rotated editorial leadership every few years, with which publishers have no interest.

OPTION 3: Initiate a new journal

Thoughts on a new journal:
From a cost perspective, establishing a new journal is relatively inexpensive. It would cost less than $100/year to host a site for a journal; A DOI/Cross Reference membership is less than $300/year.

The time commitment of administering a new journal would probably be the greatest cost to everyone in the PRD. Such journal would require peer reviewers and copy editors/proof readers, and, depending on the number of submissions, this could require a significant amount of time.

Before deciding to initiate a new journal, PRD members should consider how much time and effort they are willing to invest to assure that this new journal is successful. If this time commitment become too overwhelming during the first year or so after initiating a new journal, sun-setting the new journal could be involve many complications. Also, sun-setting a new journal within the first few years could be detrimental to each member’s professional reputation.

We are graduating new Ph.D.s in public relations and in related areas at a far greater rate than we are losing scholars to retirement. As a result, more scholars are submitting manuscripts, without increased publishing capacity and number of journals.
Advantages:

- More PR scholars are entering the field, and a new venue would provide additional opportunities to publish
- Low cost for electronic journal
- Initiating a new journal addresses long-term PRD issues
- Aligning with a new journal could offer economic resources and provide added incentives (for example, receptions and travel stipends). But is this perspective skewed by only one positive example (Political Communication Division)?

Groups and even individuals can self-publish (or print on demand) printed copies of “books” for cost at places such as CreateSpace (Amazon). The cost of a book that is the equivalent of an issue of a journal would be about $5.

A new journal would not be extra work for the Division because we are all editors and/or on editorial boards anyway; the editor works directly with the publisher.

Examples of Journals:

Political Communication
Founded in 1974.
Affiliated with ICA and American Political Science Association
Owned by divisions, not the associations
Divisions receive royalties. These Divisions negotiated for more royalties (for Ph.D. seminars and other Division activities, more support for the editorial team/office, and a contribution from the publisher for annual receptions and a sponsored editorial board meeting dinner. (Source: Claes de Vreese, editor)


Disadvantages:

- Would be hard to build impact factor
- Hard to build reputation/recognition/following
- Would lack credibility, would take years to gain credibility
- Difficulties related to establishing editorial board and becoming indexed.

JPRR is profitable for the publisher, but not to the AEJMC PRD because the contract was not written to provide money to the Division. The ICA Political Communication Division has a better contract.

Initiating a new journal would involve much more work—and likely will take a longer time for fruition—to establish a new journal that can earn a reputation and recognition.
In many institutions, impact factors dominate decisions on tenure, salary increases, and career development. Public relations scholars are severely constrained by lists and rankings. For example, only two strictly public relations journals (*Journal of Public Relations Research* and *Public Relations Review*) have achieved the double rank of Q1/A on the most widely used schema of Australia and New Zealand; thus, these scholars often must publish in less discipline-specific publications. How would this align with the PRD goal of selecting a “best public relations journal with which to affiliate? A new journal would need to stand the test of time and to grow into a high impact journal such as *JPRR* has done.

Establishing a new journal is difficult. In many countries, government-controlled publication lists rank journals for quality and desirability; for example, Australia and New Zealand have lists of preferred journals for which scholars get credit for publishing, while, in the United States, many schools have informal and formal rankings.

Building an editorial board, becoming indexed, and building a following will be difficult for PRD. Gaining credibility for the journal so that it would have value for universities worldwide would be difficult and would take many years, and journals that had a specific focus, for example, preferred methods, would be limiting. The time needed for a new journal to achieve rankings would be problematic for junior academics. The most open journal is *Public Relations Review*, so a similar journal would have to go head-to-head with a highest-ranked journal on lists in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and elsewhere. The classification system is ever-tightening and is often governed by the size of the field, and public relations is small. The publisher always “owns” the journal.

We should only establish a new journal if we contract with an existing reputable publisher.

**Summary of pros and cons of an existing journal and a newly initiated journal:**

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<th>Align with Existing</th>
<th>Create New Journal</th>
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<td><strong>Pros</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pros</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Established impact factor</td>
<td>Low cost/may generate revenue for PRD</td>
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<td>Growing need for more outlets to publish</td>
<td>Solves long-term PRD goals</td>
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<td><strong>Cons</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cons</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Little/no incentive for a journal to align with ICA PRD</td>
<td>Difficult to build impact factor in short-term, that is, would lack immediate credibility and would take years to gain it</td>
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<td>Little PRD oversight, and editors may not be rotated in a timely manner</td>
<td>Logistical challenges related to establishing an editorial board</td>
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<td>Many journals are too specific for PRD goals</td>
<td>Challenges related to becoming indexed</td>
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<td>Only two “true” PR journals- <em>JPRR</em> has affiliation; <em>PRR</em> doesn’t want affiliation</td>
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<td>Solves short-term goals</td>
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Conclusion:
The committee did not have a consensus, although this report of the committee’s deliberations provides a balanced view and rationale of the arguments for any of the options. If the PRD wishes a formal affiliation with an existing journal, we need to identify why that journal is the best choice. We must further explore the likelihood of success and how to begin a formal relationship with that journal.

If we wish to initiate a new journal, we need to determine how this will be done and the process in which a relationship with a publisher should be initiated. We also would need to articulate the mission of that journal, positioning it in contrast with existing journals (or simply justifying it because of the need for a larger number of publication venues to provide opportunities for the increasing numbers of scholars).

Committee Members’ Votes:
Dean Kruckeberg—favors no affiliation with existing or new journal.
Oyvind Ihlen—although would favor affiliation with Public Relations Review, which journal isn’t interested, votes for initiating a new journal.
Anne Lane—does not favor affiliation with an existing journal; however, votes a cautious yes for a new journal if there are clear benefits.
David McKie—question is irrelevant; scholars need to address larger issues about publishing in journals; however, PRI is sufficiently broad for ICA PRD needs.
Michael Kent—votes in favor of a new journal.
Candace White—votes in favor of a new journal.

Total votes:
No affiliation = 1
Affiliation with existing journal = 1
Affiliation with new journal = 4