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A STUDY OF HOW STUDENTS AND GRADUATES
OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS GRADUATE PROGRAM
OF ROWAN UNIVERSITY VIEW THE GRADUATE PROGRAM

by
Jessica Brittain

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
2005

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved 6-29-05

2005 Jessica Brittain

MINI ABSTRACT

Jessica Brittain

A STUDY OF HOW STUDENTS AND GRADUATES OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS GRADUATE PROGRAM OF ROWAN UNIVERSITY VIEW THE GRADUATE PROGRAM

2004/05

Dr. Donald Bagin

Master of Arts in Public Relations

The purpose of this study was to survey graduates and current students of the public relations graduate program of Rowan University to determine how they view the graduate program. Surveys were given to both current student of the program as well as graduates of the program. A large majority of the current students surveyed say they have already put to use the knowledge gained while in the graduate program. While all respondents agree to be satisfied with the program, they seemed split when it came to specific likes and dislikes of the program. The required thesis and comprehensive exam were appreciated more by the graduates than by the current students.

ABSTRACT

Jessica Brittain

A STUDY OF HOW STUDENTS AND GRADUATES OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS GRADUATE PROGRAM OF ROWAN UNIVERSITY VIEW THE GRADUATE PROGRAM

2004/05

Dr. Donald Bagin

Master of Arts in Public Relations

The Rowan University graduate school provides a Master's Degree program for public relations. The program offers students immersion in the areas of research, writing, problem solving, and planning. Also included in the program is a series of specialized modules, designed to allow students to experience many different aspects of public relations. Along with the courses, students are required to hold an internship to enrich the public relations experience. At the end of the program, students must pass a comprehensive exam to demonstrate the knowledge learned.

This study is to determine how the public relations graduate program is viewed by those who have graduated from it as well as those students who are currently enrolled in the program. All respondents seem satisfied with the program and also say they have put to use the knowledge learned while in the program. Respondents seemed split when it came to specific likes and dislikes of the program. The required thesis and comprehensive exam were appreciated more by the graduates than by the current students.

Table of Contents

Chapter One	1
Background	1
The Purpose of this Study	1
The Problem	2
Procedures	3
Limitations	3
Chapter Two	4
Survey of Related Research	4
Chapter Three	5
Method of Research	5
The Survey	5
Selecting the Population	5
Administering the Survey	6
Treating the Data Collected	6
Chapter Four	7
Research Data	7
Survey	7
Survey Results for Graduate Students	9
Survey Results for Graduates	21
Chapter Five	36
Summary	36

Conclusions	36
Recommendations	39
Suggestions for Future Research	40
BIBLIOGRAPHY	41

List of Charts

Graduate Student Charts	9
How satisfied are you with your overall experience in the Rowan University graduate program?	9
Please put the following in the order of importance to you and your studies from 1 through 5, 1 being least important and 5 being most important.	10
The graduate program requires more work than I am able to handle.	11
What do you find to be the most challenging aspect of the graduate program?	12
Have you visited the graduate resource room located in Bozorth Hall?	13
I am attending graduate school... ..	14
What age bracket do you fall under?	15
Have you already put to use knowledge learned in the graduate program?	16
Do you anticipate a career in public relations after completing the graduate program?	17
What advice would you give to a student entering the graduate program?	18
If you were in charge of the public relations program, what would you do differently?	19
If you were in charge of the public relations graduate program, what would you keep the same?	20
Graduate Charts	21
How satisfied are you with your overall experience in the Rowan University graduate program?	21
Please put the following in the order of importance to you and your studies from 1 through 5, 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important.	22
The graduate program required more work than I was able to handle.	23

What did you find to be the most challenging aspect of the program?	24
Did you ever visit the graduate resource room located in Bozorth Hall?	25
I attended graduate school... ..	26
What age bracket did you fall under while in graduate school?	27
Have you already put to use knowledge learned in the graduate program?	28
Did you always anticipate a career in public relations after completing the graduate program?	29
What do you wish you had done more of while in the graduate program?	30
From graduate school, what has helped you advance in the public relations field?	31
What advice would you give to a student entering the graduate program?	32
If you were in charge of the public relations graduate program, what would you keep the same?	33
If you were in charge of the public relations program, what would you do differently?	34

Chapter One

Background

There are more than thirty graduate level programs offered at Rowan University. Each program offers either a master's degree, doctoral degree, certification, or an educational specialist degree. The College of Communication offers two graduate programs, one in public relations, and one in writing. The public relations program prepares graduate students for a wide variety of careers. It is a highly regarded, focused program with many opportunities for applied study.

The Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how the graduate program of Rowan University is viewed by the graduate students enrolled in the public relations program. This is to get a better understanding of how the students feel about the classes they are taking, the assignments given, the research needed, and the communication between the professors and the students. A further study will examine the difference in views from those students attending graduate school part time and those who are attending full time for one year.

The results of this study should show what students enjoy about the graduate program, and also what they think might be missing from the program. Elements of the program that will be looked at include the assignments that students must complete and

the help that students receive from the professors. Also examined will be how the graduate students are able to manage their time along with an assistantship or work. The students will also be asked to give advice to future graduate students on how to better budget their time. The graduates will be asked to reflect on how they view the graduate program now that they have finished the process. Professors will be asked their opinions about the operations of the graduate program.

The Problem

This study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. How do the students in the public relations graduate program as well as graduates of the program at Rowan University view the graduate program?
2. What improvements do the students think could be made to the graduate program?
3. What features of the graduate program do the students enjoy?
4. What advice to the students have for future students involved with the graduate program?

Procedures

The procedures for this study were:

1. The writer wrote the survey questions directed toward the graduate students and graduates of the public relations program at Rowan University.
2. The survey was distributed to the students and graduates in February, 2005.
3. An interview was conducted with Professor Bagin of the public relations graduate program at Rowan University.

Limitations

All participants may not respond in a timely fashion. Some respondents may also be biased toward the public relations department based on the success of their career after graduation. Some students currently in the program may have a bias toward certain professors. All of these limitations must be taken into account in the margin of error.

Chapter Two

A Survey of Related Research

This type of study of the public relations graduate program at Rowan University has never before been conducted. The Graduate Office of Rowan University sends a survey to graduate students after graduation every other year. The latest survey conducted was in May 2005. The results can be found in the Graduate Office of Rowan University.

A search for literature on the topic was conducted using resources at the Keith and Shirley Campbell Library. A variety of tools were used to search for literature relating to the public relations graduate program at Rowan University. Search engines that were used were EBSCOhost Reseach Database, Lexis Nexis, Jstor, and Vale Literature Resource Center.

This is the first study completed on how the public relations graduate program is viewed by graduates and current students. No literature was found to indicate a similar study had been done. Therefore, there is no review of literature on this topic.

Chapter Three

Method of Research

A paper and pencil survey was distributed in all of the public relations graduate courses at Rowan University and a mailed survey was sent to graduates of the program.

Phase I - The Survey

The survey is made up of question types that can be found in Mass Media Research.¹ It includes multiple-choice questions that offer several options for the respondent to choose from. Open-ended questions are used to let the respondent create his or her own answer. A likert scale provides a number of statements referring to a certain topic. The respondent can then strongly agree, agree, be neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree.

The surveys used in this study are property of Rowan University and will be kept by the author.

Phase II - Selecting the Population to be Tested

All of the students in the public relations graduate courses at Rowan University were selected to take part in this study. The list of students was obtained from the graduate resource room. A randomly selected group of 25 alumni of the public relations

¹

Mass Media Research, an Introduction, Roger D. Wimmer and Joseph R. Dominick, (California: Wadsworth/Thomas Learning, 2003), pp. 167-198.

graduate program at Rowan University were also selected. Five of the alumni chosen were selected from the *Graduate Public Relations Department Fifteen Outstanding Alumni* pamphlet.

Phase III - Administering the Survey

The survey was passed out to students in class. The graduate professors agreed to administer the surveys to each of the classes. The return rate for the current students was 100 percent from all who were present.

The survey was mailed to alumni of the graduate program. Included with the survey was a letter explaining what this research is intended for, how much their help will benefit the graduate program and the author's research. A self addressed stamped envelope was also included. Survey participants were informed that their names would not be used in the study.

Participants were encouraged to answer the survey completely and return it immediately. A thank you letter and the finding of the study were mailed to the respondents as soon as the data was compiled.

Phase IV - Treating the Data Collected

All returned surveys were entered into SPSS. The data was compiled and is presented in Chapter IV.

The findings provide an overview of students' attitudes about the graduate program. Conclusions and recommendations based upon this information are presented in Chapter V.

Chapter Four

Research Data

The author conducted a two-prong study to determine how individuals view the public relations graduate program at Rowan University. The first study asked graduates of the program for their opinions. The second study asked current students of the program for their opinions.

Survey to all Graduate Students

The author mailed surveys to thirty graduates of the public relations graduate program of Rowan University. These graduates were randomly selected by the author from a print out of alumni. Surveys were passed out in class to fifteen current students of the program.

Specifically, the study sought to determine answers to the following questions from all past and current graduate students:

- How satisfied are/were you with your overall experience in the Rowan University graduate program?
- Did/does the graduate program require more work than you could handle?
- What do/did you find to be the most challenging aspect of the graduate program?
- Have you visited the graduate resource room located in Bozorth Hall?
- How long did you take to complete the graduate program?
- What age bracket did you fall under while in the graduate program?

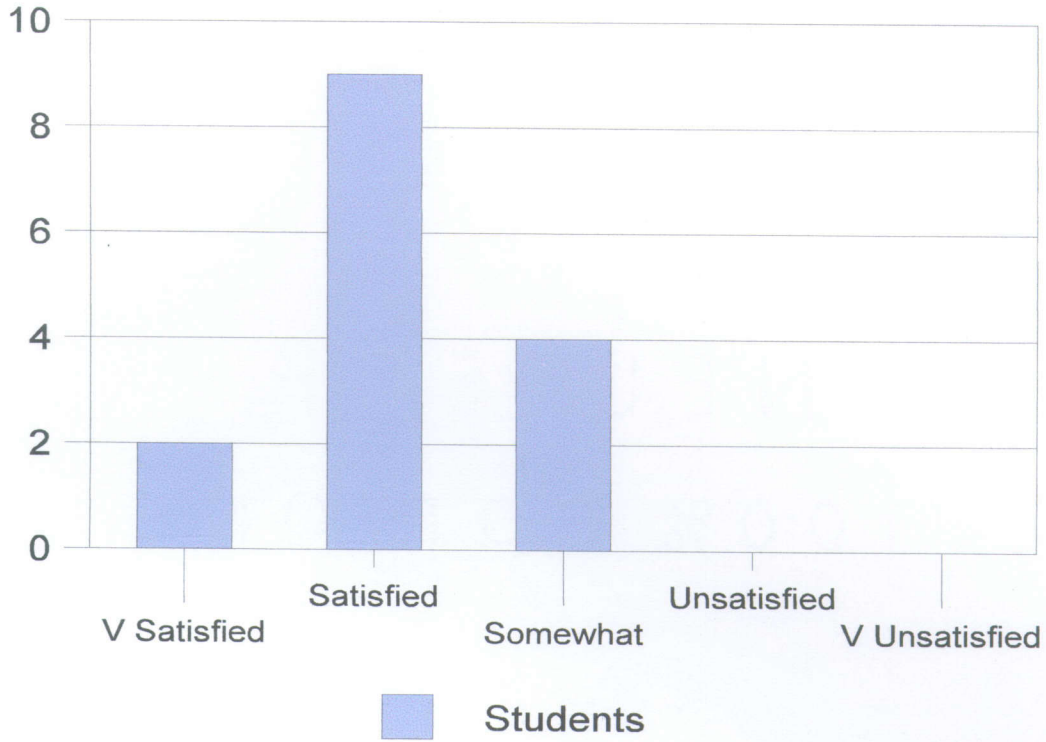
- Have you already put to use knowledge learned in the graduate program?
- Did/do you anticipate a career in public relations after completing the graduate program?
- What advice would you give to a student entering the graduate program?
- If you were in charge of the public relations graduate program, what would you do differently?
- If you were in charge of the public relations graduate program, what would you keep the same?
- From graduate school, what has helped you to succeed in the public relations field?

Of the thirty graduates who were contacted for this study, twenty completed the survey and returned it to the author in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. Of the fifteen current graduate students who received surveys to fill out in class, all fifteen of them returned the completed surveys.

In this chapter, the author presents the survey results. She also presents a question-by-question breakdown of the two separate surveys conducted. The author also included anonymous quotes pulled from the open-ended questions on the surveys.

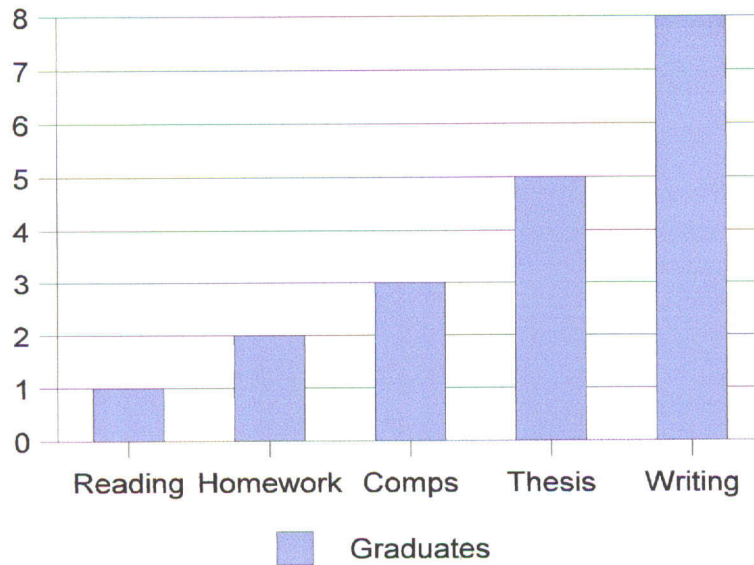
Survey Results for Current Graduate Students

Q1 How satisfied are you with your overall experience in the Rowan University graduate program?

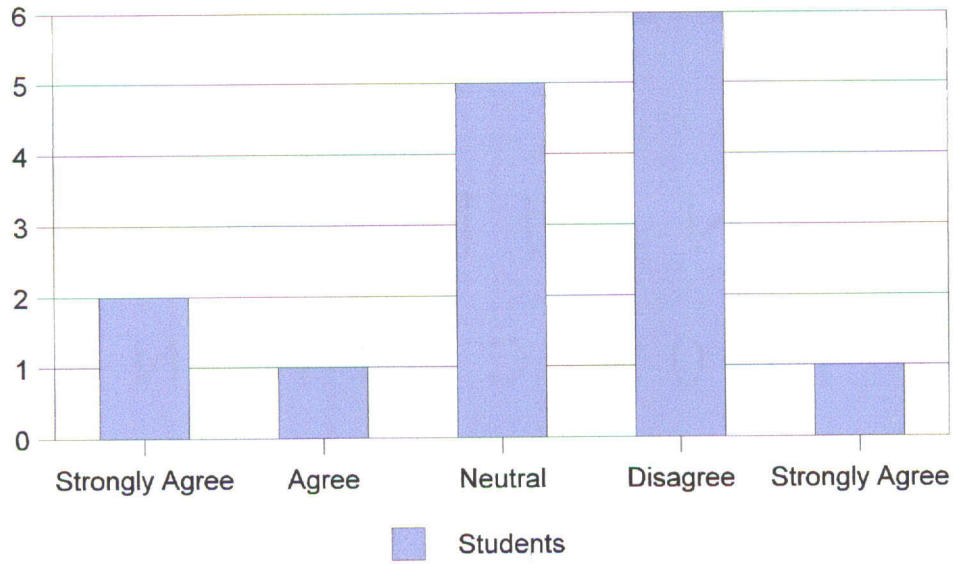


Q2 Please put the following in the order of importance to you and your studies from 1 through 5, 1 being least important and 5 being most important.

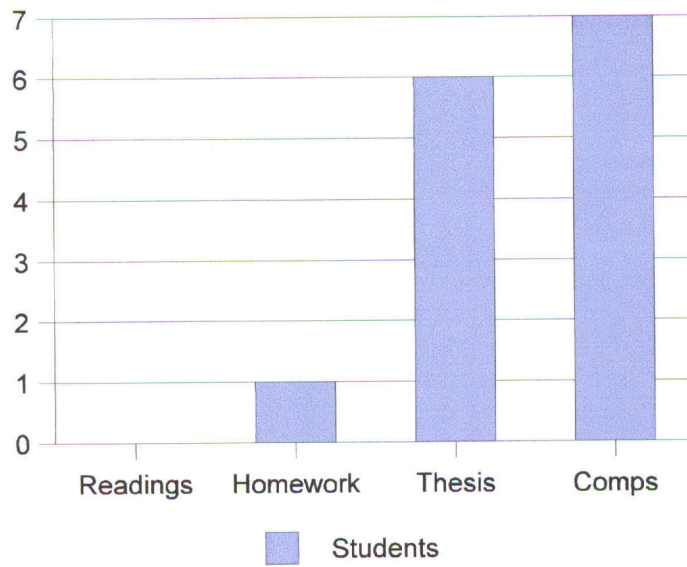
This chart displays the number of people who put a 5 next to each:



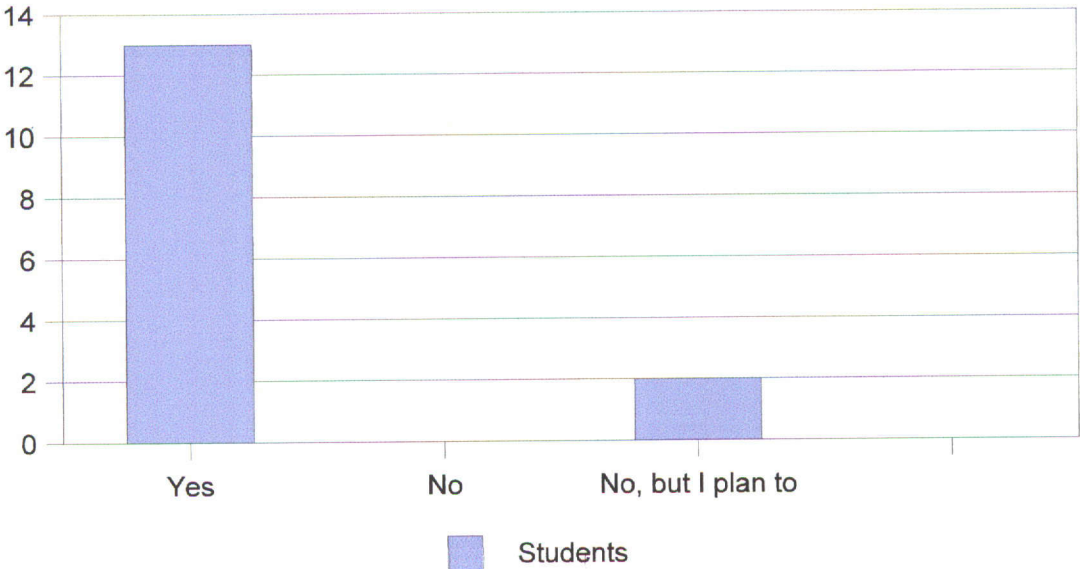
Q3 The graduate program requires more work than I am able to handle.



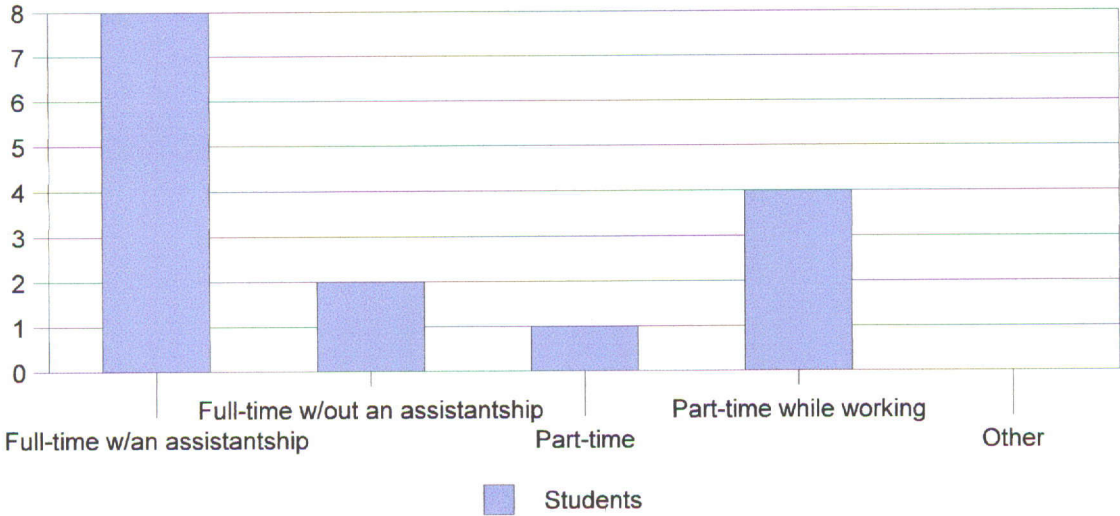
Q4 What do you find to be the most challenging aspect of the graduate program?



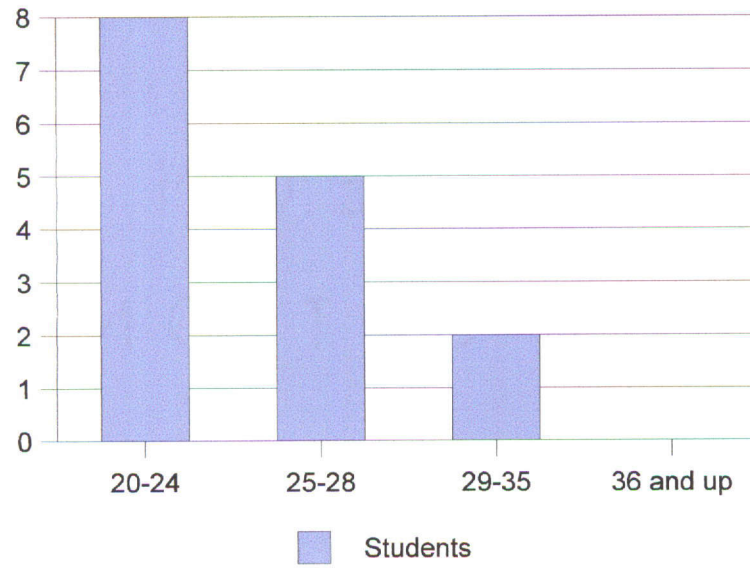
Q5 Have you visited the graduate resource room located in Bozorth Hall?



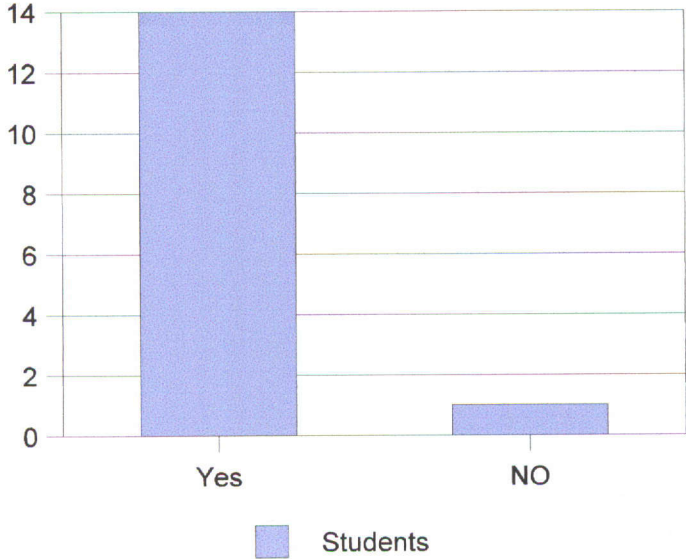
Q6 I am attending graduate school...



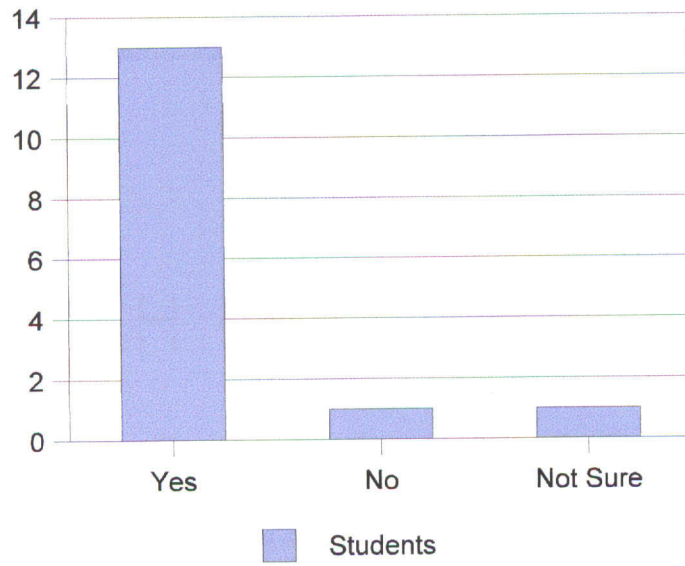
Q7 What age bracket fo you fall under?



Q8 Have you already put to use knowledge learned in the graduate program?



Q9 Do you anticipate a career in public relations after completing the graduate program?



Open-ended Question Responses

Q10 What advice would you give to a student entering the graduate program? Keep in mind, the workload, course requirements, readings, thesis, and comprehensive exam.

- Six respondents focused on time management, deadlines, and pacing oneself
- Two respondents recommend to do the program in 2 years
- Two respondents recommend to take several writing courses before entering the program
- One respondent recommends to do the program in 1 year

Q11 If you were in charge of the public relations program, what would you do differently?

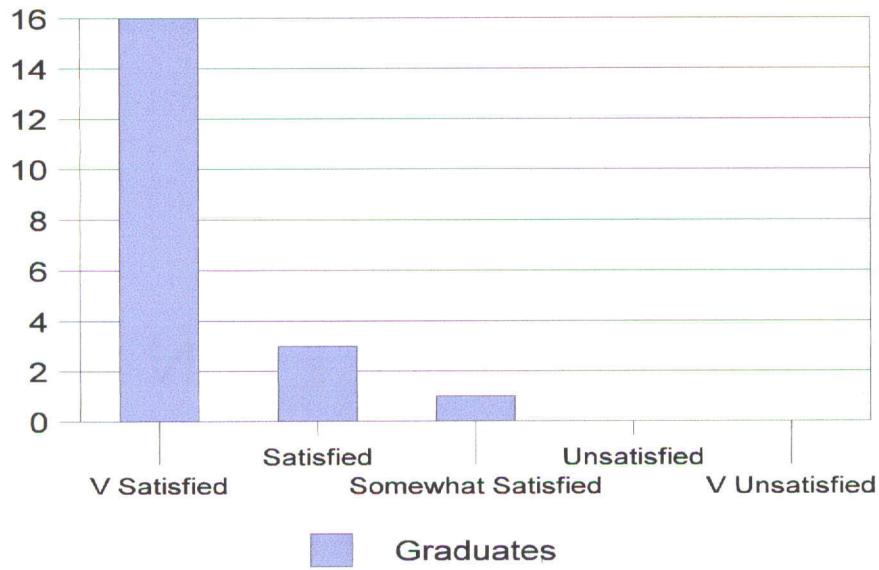
- Six respondents suggest re-evaluating the modules
- Five respondents would like to have a choice between the thesis and the comprehensive exam
- One respondent would like to update the material in the comprehensive exam
- One respondent would not change a thing

Q12 If you were in charge of the public relations graduate program, what would you keep the same?

- Four respondents want the modules to remain in the program
- Five respondents want to keep both the thesis and the comprehensive exam
- Two respondents would like to keep the professors
- One respondent would like the entire program to remain the same

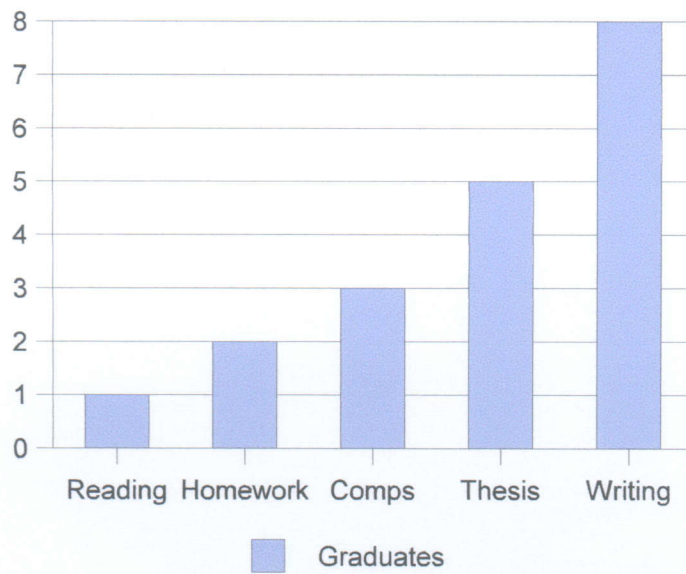
Survey Results for the Graduates of the Program

Q1 How satisfied are you with your overall experience in the Rowan University graduate program?

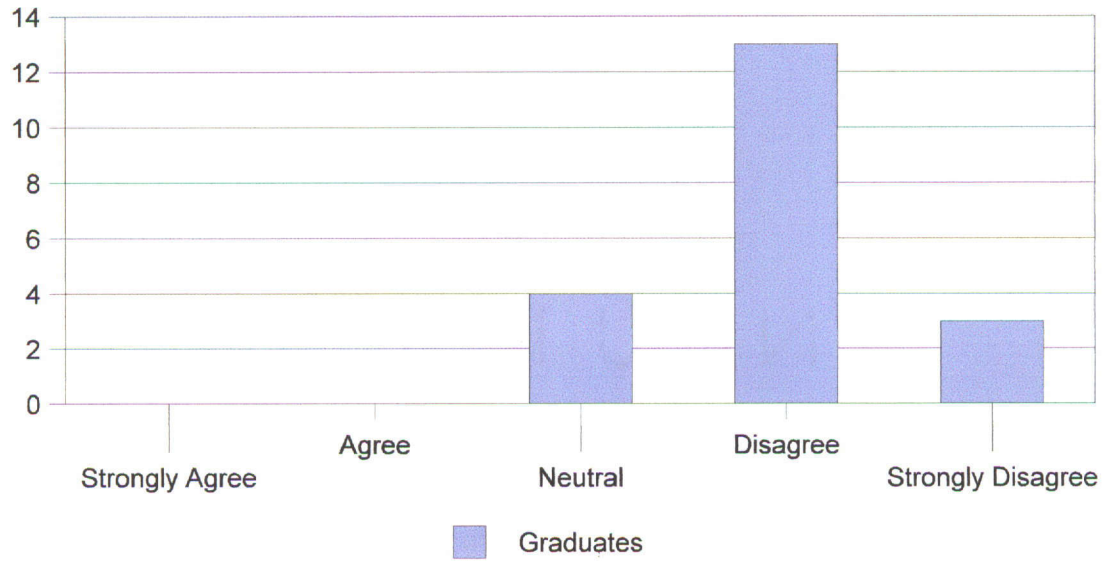


Q2 Please put the following in the order of importance to you and your studies from 1 through 5, 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important.

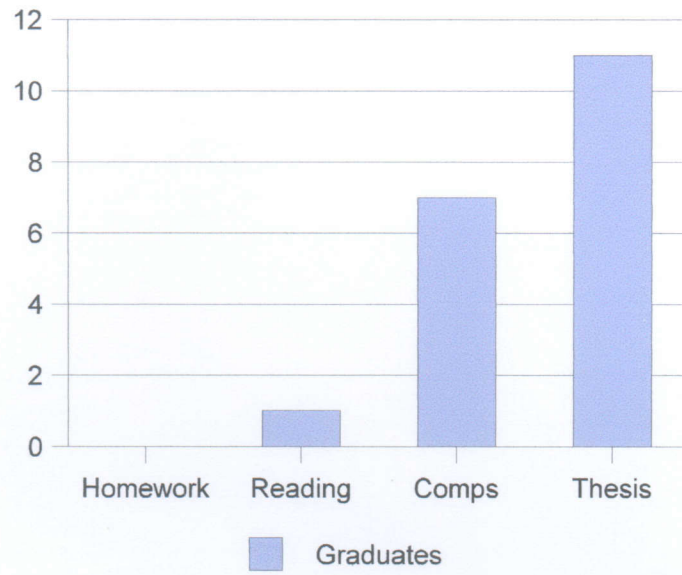
This chart shows the number of respondents who put a 5 next to each:



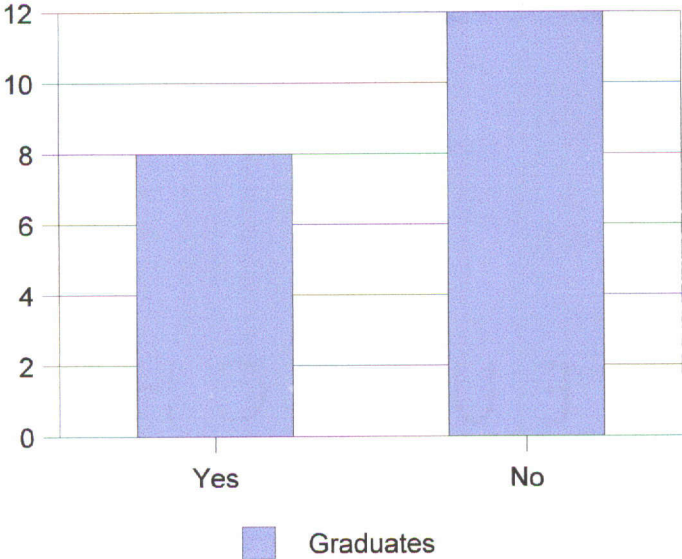
Q3 The graduate program required more work than I was able to handle.



Q4 What did you find to be the most challenging aspect of the program?

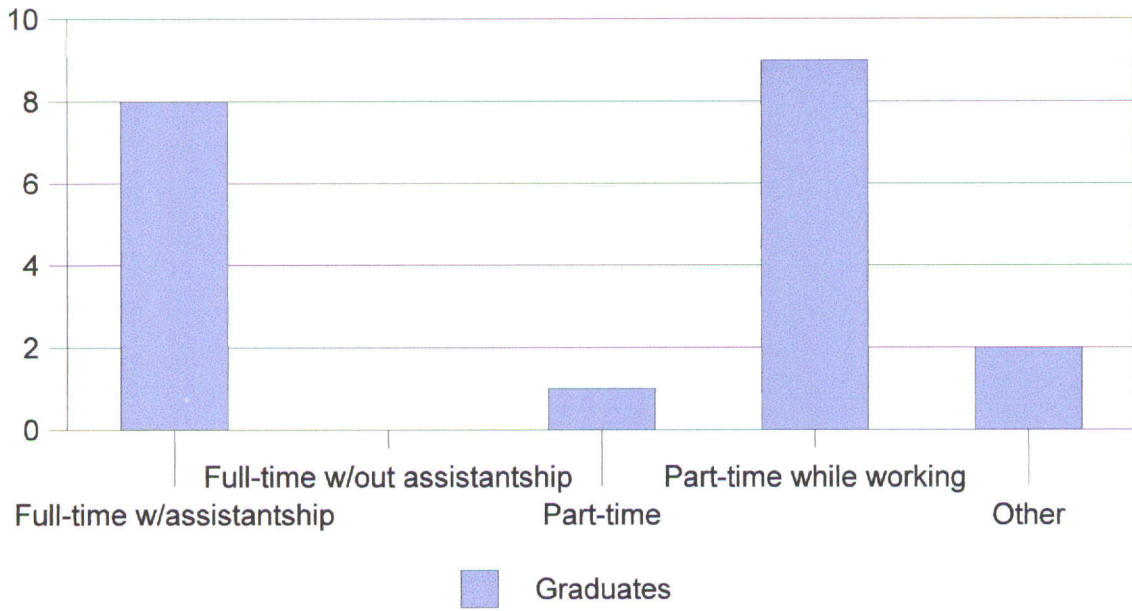


Q5 Did you ever visit the graduate resource room located in Bozorth Hall?

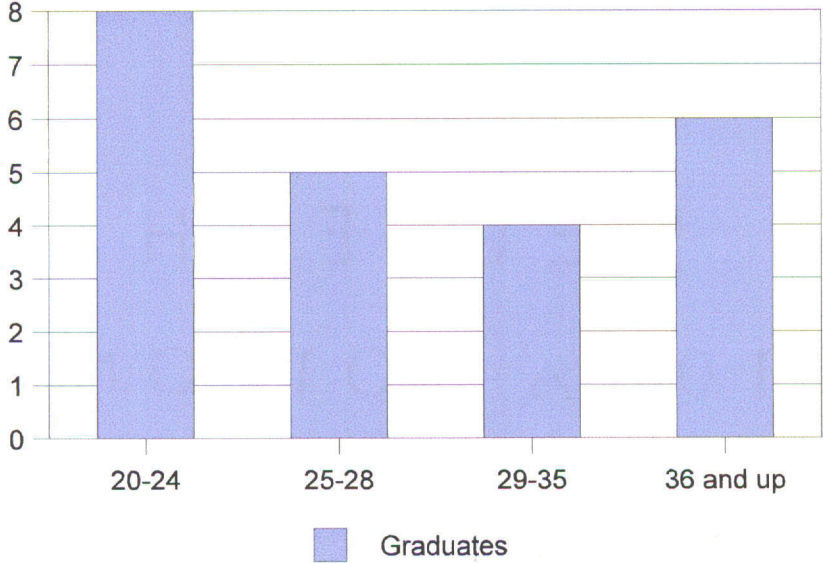


Note: Some of the respondents graduated before the graduate resource room opened.

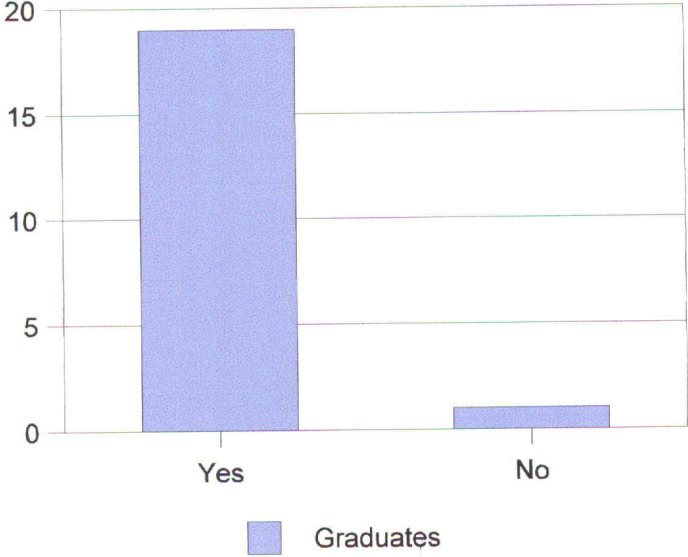
Q6 I attended graduate school...



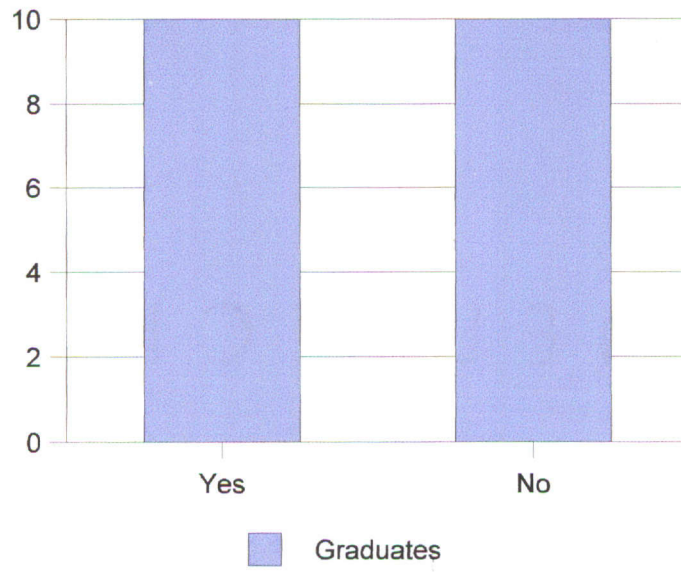
Q7 What age bracket did you fall under while in graduate school?



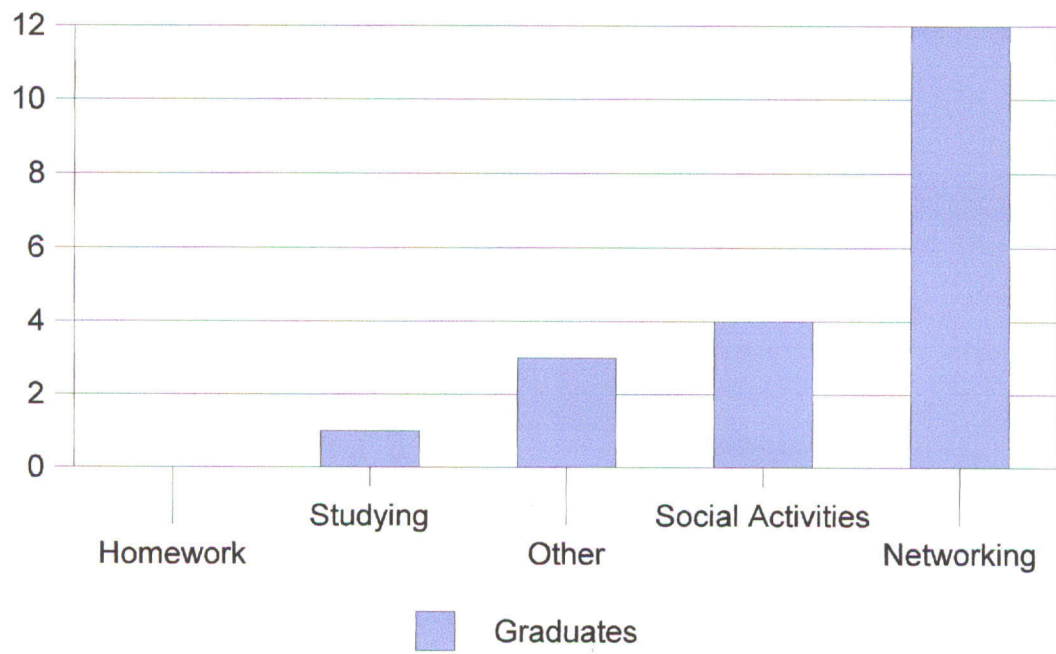
Q8 Have you already put to use knowledge learned in the graduate program?



Q9 Did you always anticipate a career in public relations after completing the graduate program?



Q10 What do you wish you had done more of while in the graduate program?



Open-ended Question Responses

Q11 From graduate school, what has helped you advance in the public relations field?

- Six respondents say that writing has helped them
- Four respondents believe the professors helped them to advance
- Two respondents attribute their advancement to their communication skills
- One respondent said he was kept current in the public relations field
- One respondent gained confidence from the program
- One respondent attributes the reputation of the graduate program at Rowan University

Q12 What advice would you give to a student entering the graduate program? Keep in mind the workload, course requirements, readings, thesis, and comprehensive exam.

- Six respondents focused on time management, deadlines, and pacing oneself
- Two respondents suggest to get to know the professors and network with each other
- Two respondents encourage students to put their knowledge to use as soon as possible in an internship or job
- One respondent suggests to get published and get involved in projects outside of class

Q14 If you were in charge of the public relations graduate program, what would you keep the same?

- Eight respondents would keep the thesis and the comprehensive exam
- Four respondents would keep the same professors
- One respondent would like to keep the modules
- One respondent would like to keep mostly everything the same

Q13 If you were in charge of the public relations program, what would you do differently?

- Keep in mind that not all students majored in PR for their undergraduate degree
- Include more presentation skills and related technology. I might require participation in a PR association and/or events.
- Cut down the comprehensive exam so the preparation is not so stressful
- Stricter enrollment requirements for students
- Provide full-time and part-time professors opportunities to share classroom activities/curriculum so there is less repetition in lessons
- More case studies
- Provide more opportunities for the graduate students on the job and internships
- More public speaking opportunities, push students harder
- Provide outside experts on writing a thesis
- Place more emphasis on internship and provide more assistance in finding them for the student
- Choice between comprehensive exam and writing a thesis
- Have the comprehensive exam also prepare those in the workforce for the APR exam
- Make the modules different
- Offer more technology modules with a specific focus in graphic design and audio/visual editing

- Add more concerning organizations
- Some professors
- Make the modules longer and add another Quark class

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

A study was conducted on the public relations graduate program at Rowan University. The purpose was to identify the perceptions of students currently in the program as well as those who have already graduated from the program. Students currently in the program were given surveys in class. The surveys asked the students for their thoughts on all aspects of the graduate program. Surveys were mailed to graduates of the program. The surveys asked the graduates for their thoughts on all aspects of the graduate program, looking back on their experiences.

Conclusions

The author found that all students surveyed who are currently enrolled in the public relations program at Rowan University are satisfied with the program. Of the 15 students surveyed, the majority of five believe that reading for class was the most important element of the graduate program. The next most important element of the program was a tie between homework and the comprehensive exam.

Seven of the students believe that the workload of the program was fair, while three believe it was more than they were able to handle. Five students were neutral on the size of the workload. The two most challenging aspects of the program were the comprehensive exam with seven votes and the thesis with six.

Thirteen of the students surveyed have visited the resource room located in Bozorth Hall, while two have not but plan to when they begin their theses.

Out of 15 students, eight were attending graduate courses full-time with an assistantship. Two were attending full-time without an assistantship, four were part-time while working, and one was simply a part-time student. All of the eight students who were attending full-time with an assistantship fell between the ages of 20 and 24. Five of the other students were between the ages 25 and 28, and two were between 29 and 35 years of age.

A majority of fourteen students say they have already put to use the knowledge they have gained through the graduate program. Thirteen students anticipate a career in the field of public relations after completing the program, while one does not and one is not sure.

The author compiled advice from the students in the program to give to future students in the program. Nine of the students surveyed focused on deadlines, budgeting time, and pacing oneself as the main advice they would leave to students in the program. Also included in this section was the importance to study for the comprehensive exam at least eight weeks in advance. Another recommendation made was to get to know the professors.

The 15 students were asked what aspects of the graduate program they would change and what aspects they would keep the same if they were in charge of the program. Many of the responses were split right down the middle. Half of the students enjoy the modules, while the other half would like to see the program without the modules. Half of the students find the comprehensive exam beneficial, while the other half finds it unnecessary. One suggestion made

by five of the students was to require either writing a thesis or taking a comprehensive exam, rather than requiring both.

The author found that all 20 graduates surveyed were satisfied with the public relations graduate program of Rowan University. Eight of the graduates believe that writing was the most important aspect of the program followed by the thesis with five responses. Sixteen of the graduate believe that the workload of the program was fair, while four respondents were neutral.

The thesis was believed to be the most challenging aspect of the graduate program by eleven graduates, closely followed by the comprehensive exam by seven. Nineteen of those surveyed have already put to use the knowledge gained while in the graduate program. Respondents were split in half as to whether they had anticipated a career in public relations while in the program.

More than half of the graduates say that while in the program they wish they had done more networking, while twenty five percent wish they had participated in more social activities.

The graduates were asked what aspects of the program have helped them to advance in the public relations field. Six respondents believe their writing skills proved the most useful, four stated that the relationships built with the professors helped with their careers. Other responses boasted communication skills, specialized classes, and the prestige of the Rowan University graduate program.

The graduates were asked to give advice to students entering into the graduate program. More than one quarter of the respondents focused on deadlines, budgeting times, and pacing

oneself while in the program. Other suggestions were to get to know the professors and begin to network with one another.

The 20 graduates surveyed were asked which aspects of the graduate program they would change if they were in charge of the program. The responses varied very much and can be found in chapter four. When asked which aspects of the program they would keep the same eight respondents said they would keep both the comprehensive exam and the thesis. Four graduates would also like to see the faculty remain the same.

Recommendations

The author has discovered that the public relations graduate program of Rowan University leaves an overall feeling of satisfaction with those who have attended it. Also, the advice given to future students of the program should always include an emphasis on deadlines, time management, and pacing oneself while in the program.

The responses of current students in the program were split when it came to the thesis and the comprehensive exam. It is unclear whether students find the two requirements useful or unnecessary. However, the graduates who were surveyed found both of the requirements to prove beneficial in their future endeavors. Therefore, it can be said that in looking back on the program years from now, the thesis and the comprehensive exam will prove valuable to those who have gone through the program.

The findings of this study will be made available to the professors of the public relations graduate program as well as the graduate school of Rowan University. Based on the responses

of the current students and graduates of the program the faculty decide on any changes that would benefit the program.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study was conducted to find how students of the public relations graduate program view the program. A study could be conducted on a larger number of graduates. This study could include the job placement statistics of those who have attended the graduate program.

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