

From a senior's perspective: Best college classes for a well-rounded PR pro

By Seah Bankston, Senior, Stetson University, Major: Communications

As with many college students, I entered the scene with a particular career in mind, but through taking classes and learning more about myself and the prospective job offerings, I switched gears. That switch led me to communications, and I've compiled here some of the most beneficial courses I've taken during my time at Stetson University in DeLand, in hopes it will help another career-seeking college student who's considering the public relations profession.

As a freshman, I recognized my communicative strengths and abilities, but declared a marine biology major. I completed a year of the program, but found that the subjects I intended to study were scarce, and further, upper division courses unavailable to underclassmen. The prospective job market wasn't ideal, either.

In my sophomore year, my professor suggested I enroll in a few communications courses as gen-education requirements. There, I found a sea of opportunity in hands-on assignments and class presentations necessary to complete the course. I tested the waters, class by class, and by junior year I was a full-fledged communications major, diving head first into the world of communications. I took courses ranging from interpersonal communication to qualitative theory and methodology, and through it all, I gained more confidence in my ability to communicate with others.

In short, I learned that employers are searching for students exhibiting leadership skills, admirable communications skills and passion for what they do, and here are my suggestions for becoming just that!

- **Learn the principles of interpersonal communications...early.** I recommend enrolling in interpersonal communication to learn the principles of verbal and nonverbal exchanges in everyday interactions. A course like interpersonal communication can emphasize the significance of building relationships and interacting with peers. This course also hones in on the little things we often overlook, such as reading and understanding someone's body language in conversation.
- **Make time for beneficial business courses.** Taking a business course like human relations or "leadership and teamwork" also should accompany entry-level

communications courses. In these courses, I learned how to strengthen my friendships and professional relationships.

- **Learn to communicate with anyone, anywhere.** I enroll in intercultural communication to broaden my understanding of cross-culture exchanges and communication. This course discusses cultural customs, ideas, and ways of living and how these ideologies are shared across cultures inhabiting the same location. Choosing a business course on global leadership would also enhance these skills.
- **Speak out!** For sophomores, I recommend taking a public speaking class accompanied by health communication, communication and technology and/or acting. In all of these courses I had the opportunity to give speeches, create and recite poetry, perform skits and scenes, give presentations on technology in use, and work in small groups with others. These classes provided the skills necessary to give a presentation, while curbing my anxiety for speaking in front of variously sized crowds.
- **Write, write, write!** Upper division courses always seem to be the most challenging, but the most beneficial, for thesis-writing and preparation for graduate dissertations. I recommend taking qualitative theory and methodology in a junior year of study, to leave room for grad school preparation and/or job searches in the senior year. In this course, I learned how to conduct and transcribe an interview, how to collect qualitative data using various formats, and the ethics and laws behind employing qualitative methods to conduct research. For a student seeking a career in television, broadcasting, film production, interviewing tools are vital. You never know when you may need to host an interview and this course provides the knowledge on how to do so in various settings.
- **Get analytical.** Taking a rhetorical theory and criticism course can provide the skills necessary to conduct a rhetorical analysis of a text or film. Rhetorical studies are useful for scholarly writing and careers in college education, commercial design, filmmaking, etc. I also recommend accompanying these courses with advertising, marketing, public relations, journalism/news, internships, media design, and/or broadcasting to expand knowledge of specializing/working in the communications field and employing rhetoric.

- **Get involved in campus activities and put leadership skills to test.** In addition to the curriculum, assume leadership roles around campus, get involved in clubs and organizations, and participate in events and community service projects to practice all of the skills that have been learned. These courses combined with campus involvement and leadership can be most beneficial to building a resume and landing a good job that a communications professional can enjoy for years to come.