

RE-IMAGINE PR

THROUGH THE LENS OF CENTENNIAL COLLEGE'S CCPR PROGRAM

Grooming the future of PR

BY ASHRAF DABIE

Learn how Centennial College contributes to the public relations industry in Toronto.



"PR has come to a reckoning – we're not just about publicity."

Barry Waite

Chair of school of communications,
media, arts and design

Centennial College



The evolution of PR in Canada

Public Relations, like many other industries, has undergone a significant evolution. In the past two decades, PR has become more recognized for its integral role in the world of business and communications, rather than being grouped together with technical skills such as graphic designing and advertising.

This is according to Barry Waite, chair of the school of communications, arts, media and design at Centennial College. "I think that PR has come to a reckoning around the fact that we're not just about publicity," he said.

Unlike an advertising campaign, PR is more difficult to measure as it is less of a science and more about building trust in a company, brand or individual, Waite explained. This realization brought about a change in the teaching of PR, which ultimately opened the doors for better access to the industry.

"PR was not often put as a career option to students in the 80s and 90s," said Waite, and as a result, a recognized PR program was a hard find. Instead, universities were offering individual courses or minors in PR-related skills as part of another program.

"I would get a lot of students who would come to me and say, I want to be in PR, I've just finished my three- or four-year degree. And what I would say to them is, you got to go to college," he further said.

While a university education offers critical thinking skills, Waite explained that college programs allow students to gain relevant skills and experience to prepare them for employment.

With better access to the industry also came diversification. "My heart was broken when students told me, 'we go to these events, and we don't see ourselves'," the school chair said.

"Our wish is that, particularly BIPOC students feel comfortable in the industry, that they want to go out and meet people and move away from the stereotype of who's a PR person," he said, speaking about the PR program at Centennial College.

So, if you are still on the fence about whether PR is the right fit for you, know this – the industry is now more exciting and welcoming than ever before.

About the magazine

Re-Imagine PR seeks to explore the unique features and strategic approach of Centennial College's public relations and corporate communications program (CCPR), in preparing students for the evolving PR industry in Toronto.

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Finding the right start in PR

Grooming the future of PR



"CCPR is always one step ahead of the industry"

Donna Lindell

Program Coordinator

If you have a way with words, a passion for people and eye for creativity, then public relations may be the right fit for you. Consider giving yourself a head start in the industry with a post-graduate certificate in public relations and corporate communications (CCPR) from Centennial College.

CCPR is a hands-on, experiential learning program, known for producing award-winning student projects and graduates who help in reshaping the industry across Toronto.

The program is led by a team of seasoned industry practitioners, with an advisory committee consisting of executives from corporate, agency, government and non-profit.

Experiential learning meets integrated approach

Part of what makes CCPR so successful is that fact that the faculty understand that no two days in PR are the same. As a result, they have taken an integrated approach to ensure students are prepared to take on whatever the industry may throw their way. This intensive, two-semester program equip students with everything they need, from professional writing, to project and event planning and beyond.

"The program is integrated because it reflects what is happening in the industry," says Donna Lindell, CCPR program coordinator.

In order to do so, CCPR goes beyond the basic required skills by allowing students to work with real clients on campaigns called Storyworks and gain experience from field placements.

Another unique feature of the program is its focus on understanding business

communications. "You're just teaching half of the equation, unless you're teaching the importance of how communications contribute to businesses achieving their goals," Lindell explained.

"Just understanding how business works, that creates much more credibility. And so, that's one thing that we've always prided ourselves in having," added school chair, Barry Waite.

The programs experiential learning nature of collaborating with real client is another element that causes it to stand out, according to Waite.

"The program is constantly evolving to remain current. We have to be one step ahead of the profession," said Lindell.

"We are grooming the future of PR, not the PR of yesterday," she added.

Is CCPR right for you?

- ☐ Do you enjoy writing and public speaking?
- ☐ Are you creative?
- ☐ Do you enjoy planning events and campaigns?
- ☐ Are you a hard worker?

If your answer is yes, then check out the CCPR program and consider applying. This program starts in Fall and Winter. "You have to be willing to make the investment because it's not a light program." - Coordinator, Donna Lindell.

Meet the faculty



Lyn Whitham, Donna Lindell, Laurie Hall & Barry Waite

Donna Lindell

Program Coordinator

- Named among Canada's Top 40 Under 40 - 2003
- Led major financial services accounts
- Youngest female VP at Manulife
- CPRS Educator of the Year - 2019

A student-centric approach won Paolo Zinatelli CPRS's Educator of the Year

It was a long journey from an elevator attendant to award-winning educator for Paolo Zinatelli, but a humbling one, nonetheless. He went from ushering tourists to the top of the Minolta tower at Niagara Falls to now leading students to the height of their careers in the communications industry as an instructor at Centennial College.

Being an educator, however, was not always a part of his plans. Zinatelli grew up watching the news and wanted to be that person on the screen. This led him to pursue journalism, with law as a backup plan.

During his time at the University of Western Ontario, Zinatelli began writing for the student newspaper. As simple as it may seem, it grew into a career on the editorial team at *The National Post*, where he served for nine years before moving to the *Toronto Star*.

It was not until 2012 that Zinatelli took the leap towards becoming an educator, when a former colleague was looking around the office at *The National Post* to pass on the role of copy-editing instructor in the CCPR program. He thought, "why not?"

Zinatelli also lent his expertise to the college's journalism program but his student-centric approach has made him a pillar on the CCPR team. "I want students to feel like they're getting their value from me as a teacher," he said, adding, "I want to provide tangible

knowledge that they can take and apply to their careers."

So, while a nomination for CPRS Educator of the Year 2020 may have been a surprise to Zinatelli, it was no surprise to those around him.

"This is not only because he makes the material he is teaching both engaging and relevant to our careers, but because he also treats us like peers,

rather than subordinates," Mubashira Nusrat Farooqi, a now CCPR graduate, told CPRS.

Farooqi and the entire CCPR graduating class of 2020 were the ones to submit the nomination, which went on to be the winning entry.

While winning the award as an honour for Zinatelli, he also takes it as a challenge. "I've been recognized for the work that I do, and I appreciate it. But it means I need to keep pushing myself forward, so that I can improve upon the experience for students," he said.



Paolo Zinatelli

Finding happiness and success in teaching.

Being passionate about your job is one thing. But, being as devoted to it as Lyn Whitham is to teaching is hard to match. This is because teaching, or as she would say, “continuing intellectual stimulation,” is a genuine source of happiness and energy, which she reinvests into her relationship with students.

“They revitalise me and they give me energy, and I feel a connection to the next generation, which is, personally, very fulfilling,” she said.

Teaching, however, is not her only passion. Whitham started out in the media as a reporter at CBC and worked her way through several Canadian and international organizations, holding executive positions on the communications team in corporate,

non-profit and agency settings. She also manages her own consulting business, working with top names in industries such as finance and healthcare, providing services in strategic communications, crisis management and stakeholder relations, just to name a few. “I also find my consulting work quite fulfilling, because I get to practice what I preach,” she said.

Leading Mount Sinai Hospital's communication strategy during the H1N1 pandemic, is one of the many highlights of her career, thus far. Whitham is an epitome of success in the communications and public relations industry and her experiences offer an invaluable resource to her students.

Even before joining the CCPR team at Centennial College, Whitham had been in talks with program officials. “I just intuitively knew that I would love it.”

While she has taught several courses over the years, Whitham treasures her role as the writing instructor.

Writing is fundamental to our profession and my objective with the writing classes is to build confidence in my students, so that they know they can go out and handle any writing assignment,” she explained. “If my students have the skills, and the confidence to take on writing, then I think we're giving them a great benefit and a differentiator to take into their careers,” Whitham added.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the seasoned health sector communicator pointed out that the need for great communication has never been stronger. “What I would recommend to students is always be flexible and willing to learn because everything is changing so rapidly. If you don't anticipate change, you're going to be left behind,” she advised. “And always be professional,” Whitham added, a motto she personally exemplifies.



Lyn Whitham



Laurie Hall

BEYOND THE GLITZ AND GLAMOUR OF PR

From riding in a limousine with Paris Hilton to putting her career on hold for her family, Laurie Hall has had quite the journey in public relations. Her career as an educator is no different as she went from wanting to pursue teaching to later deciding it may not be the right fit for her. It took a bit of traveling and a career test for Hall find her true calling, and that was PR.

The fashion, food and entertainment enthusiast landed her first PR-related job at local award-winning agency, Strategic Objectives, where she worked her way up from administrative assistant to account director. Her journey took a few glamorous turns, such as working on major fashion events and launching her own company, Flex PR, before Hall turned her attention back to teaching in 2015.

While working with a team of PR consultants, The Siren Group, Hall met several recent CCPR graduates who impressed her with their skills and work ethics. “I was like, wow, this is amazing. They are really teaching these kids stuff that we really need help with right now,” she recalled. Hence, joining the CCPR team was an easy decision.

Hall first taught writing, and later added events, presentation skills and the program's highlight, Storyworks, to her portfolio. She takes to her classes years of industry experience in planning and executing events and managing campaigns, offering crucial insights on time management and working in teams.

Her go-to teaching technique is having one-on-one sessions with her students, as often as possible. “I found that really seems to help to keep them on track. Just communicating and getting back to students when they have questions, it really helps,” she said. Hall's advice to aspiring PR practitioners is to stay informed, strive for perfection and be prepared to do whatever it takes. “I went out and bought tights for Paris Hilton, that was my job,” she said.

Preparing for the world of work



El-Bakri at a CCPR student-organized event

Instilling confidence in emerging PR practitioners

In public relations, confidence is key. Whether be it presenting your proposal to a client or speaking to the media on behalf of your company, it is essential that you portray a degree of self-awareness and conviction. But how do you achieve such confidence? For Sarah El-Bakri, it was through the hands-on experience she gained from the CCPR program that assured her she's ready to take the world of PR.

El-Bakri holds a degree in marketing but was not sure it is the right fit for her. Her job as a beauty advisor at Sephora was her first exposure to communications, from training salespersons to assisting with the planning of corporate events.

An online career quiz offered by Centennial College matched her personality and interests to public relations and recommended the CCPR program. "I loved that it was only a one-year post-graduate and that it was really practical. I really wanted actual experience where I can like get to talk to people get to know exactly what it is," she explained.

During her time in the program, El-Bakri served as a represent on the student steering committee of the Canadian Public Relations Society – Toronto while building a portfolio, which includes materials from executing a successful event and an award-winning campaign. "Probably the most exciting moment for me was making my first pitch to a journalist and actually getting picked up and we got on the radio. So that was kind of like, 'Oh, my God,' this actually happens," she recalled.

According to the new graduate, PR is not as glamorous as it looks. "One of the things that surprised me the most was like how much work it actually was. But it's actually more fun work than I expected," she said. However, being able to refine her already existing skills in writing and events planning and building new ones in areas such as media relations, she is fully prepared to embark on a career in the industry. "I feel like there's nothing stopping me now from saying that I am qualified for the and that's amazing," said the CCPR grad.

Kadeem Griffiths' journey from the CCPR program to landing a job

In a competitive job market such as the PR industry, not many are fortunate enough to secure employment in their field right out of school. While this was not exactly the case for Kadeem Griffiths, his PR journey took off from the moment he left the CCPR program. Griffiths went from working on a project with CivicAction, to interning at the Pan American Games, before embarking on a field placement at TTC, all in the span of a few months.

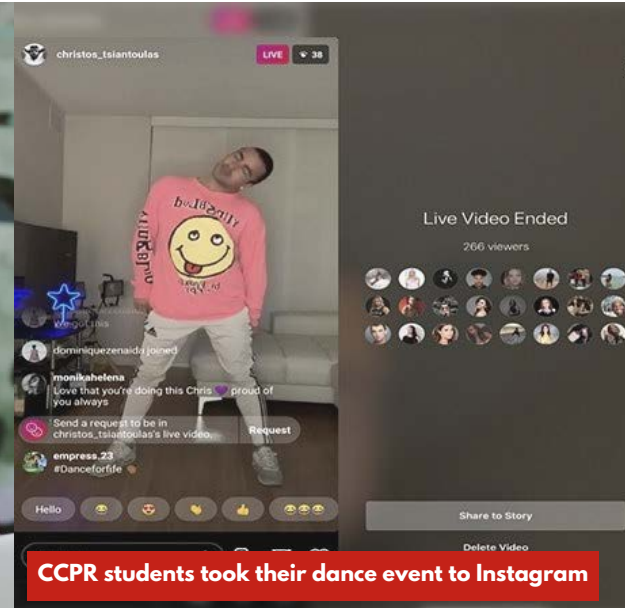
With a little bit of luck and a lot of curiosity to learn and grow, the new graduate had several extensions to his paid internship with the city's transit commission until

eventually joining the team as a full-time staff. "I was doing really good work and when things started to get more intense, it just kind of made sense," Griffiths explained. He went from internal communications to frontline media relations and even took on the role of TTC spokesperson, from time to time, before moving to Morneau Shepell as a senior specialist in internal communications.

"My time in the programme kind of went full circle," Griffiths said, as each of these opportunities had some link or the other to CCPR. He attributes much of his success to the hands-on learning he received from the college, especially in being able to work with clients and develop skills such as professional writing. "I was looking at different programs and when I went to Centennial, it really just felt like the right place for me," he recalled. "The programme was fantastic," Griffiths added, confirming that he made the right choice.

ONLINE LEARNING

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FROM IN-CLASS LEARNING TO ONLINE

How CCPR pivoted online, without affecting the quality of learning

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of all Centennial College campuses. The college was forced to transition to online learning and do so quickly, without hampering the quality of education being offered to students. The Story Arts Centre, where the CCPR program is being offered, remains closed to date and classes are being offered through virtual platforms.

CCPR program coordinator, Donna Lindell, is confident in her faculty's efforts to transition the program online. She noted that the quality of the program is being maintained and, in some cases, it has even gotten better.

"We've made all the content, and the way it's presented, much clearer; we've made sure all our course outlines are tighter and more relevant," said Lindell. Writing instructor Lyn Whitham agreed, saying, "What I endeavoured to do was to make sure that what we were exploring in our classes was crystal clear. So, I have to be really organized and structured, and deliver with great clarity," she said.

Whitham explained that student concentration span is a concern that the faculty has taken into consideration when creating its the course outlines for online delivery and as a result, shorter sessions and additional breaks were incorporated to address this.

An opportunity for improvements

Lindell highlighted that the transition online has presented an opportunity for revamp the program to ensure it is up-to-date with what is happening in the industry. "I'm, in many ways, really excited about this opportunity, because you can create a balance of asynchronous and synchronous. It was a really great opportunity to sort of clean up the cobwebs and keep the stuff that we loved and get rid of the stuff that we never loved," she said.

One example would be that the program now offers even less of a theoretical approach, making almost the entire program a practical learning experience. At the same time, elements of the program such as Storyworks, events and field placements are now done virtually to reflect the new digital approach in the PR industry.

The transition has had its advantages as well as disadvantages according to Lindell. Among the advantages is the fact that students from across the globe can be enrolled in the program without physically being in Canada. "The fact that I'm able now to do a class with somebody in the Philippines, kind of cool, right?"

On the flip side, however, there are missed opportunities for social interaction with not being able to have everyone in the same room. However, the CCPR professors are being creative, using different tools such as Slack and Padlet, to try as best to create a learning experience similar or even better than what students would have received on campus.

Accessing resources online

Existing and new resources is now available to students online

Now, more than ever, students are in need for resources and additional support to assist with their learning experience and guarantee their success. Recognizing this, Centennial College has moved many of its services online, while creating new platforms for students to access the assistance they may need when working and studying from home.

"I think it was abrupt and challenging for everyone involved. However, I'm incredibly proud of the way the faculty was able to pivot to the online learning modality so quickly, with virtually no time to really prepare for it," said student success advisor for communications and media programs, Marianne Sipione. She noted that the

college is trying to mimic on-campus learning and enhance it as much as possible. "So, although online is going to be different, it's not necessarily going to be worse. In some ways, it's better because it's allowing us this opportunity to sort of reimagine the way we do things," she added.

The online resources includes:

01

COVID-19 Information Centre

All the latest updates and relevant information is available on the college's website.

02

Online learning toolkit

A tab including materials and resources to help students with online learning was added to the college's website.

04

Device loan programme

The college is providing a laptop to students who do not have access to a computer.

06

Learning strategists

Learning strategists provide support in areas such as time management, etc.

03

Online counsellors

Students can access counselling online through the Centre for Accessible Learning.

05

E-Centennial bootcamp

A new module was added to e-Centennial to educate students on navigating the different platforms being used in online learning.

Tips for success

01

Ask for help early

The college has many support services and resources to help students. So, if you are struggling, reach out.

02

Have a positive mindset

Your mindset changes everything! So, for positive results, look towards the positives.

Accessing these resources:



Most of these resources can be accessed through the college's website at centennialcollege.ca



Contact Centennial's COVID hotline:
416-289-5000 or 1-800-268-4419



Reach out to the Centre for Accessible Learning:
CALCS Website: <http://centennialcollege.ca/calcs>
Telephone: 416-289-5000 ext. 3850
Email: calcs@centennialcollege.ca

Finding the right start for you

Choosing non-profit was the right start for me

By Nicholas Béchard
CCPR graduate

Being a student or new graduate is definitely scary right now. Many of us are fighting for the small handful of jobs that are available to us. While many students want to jump into the corporate pool right away, beginning a career or volunteering in non-profit humbles you and is a great way to gain valuable experience.

My field placement was done at Hope Air, a charity that pays for flights and accommodations for those who need access to medical care far from home. I thought it would be a good idea to start my career off doing some good, before

I decided to sell my soul to an evil corporation. Ironically, I was lucky to continue on afterwards, while many of my classmates who interned in more profitable sectors had not been so lucky.

Not only this, but my supervisor also gave me an incredible opportunity; to run communications on Hope Air's third annual Give Hope Wings Expedition, its biggest fundraising event of the year. My position mostly dealt with media relations, with other opportunities as well.

This experience taught me a lot about media relations. The thing I learned the most is being aware of how journalists operate; what is the best time to send a release, appropriate times to have them talk to pilots to meet their deadlines, etc. I also dealt with media sponsorships. This included creating a sponsorship deck and pitching stories to the media.

This was really exciting as I was able to gain the attention of more well-known media entities such as CTV and Radio-Canada.

Starting my career in the non-profit sector has kept me enthusiastic about something I genuinely care about. Working with Hope Air has been a humbling experience for me.

My advice to students and new grads is to volunteer with organizations whose missions you're passionate about, while searching for jobs. Using your newly acquired skills to volunteer and do good, while you job hunt, allows you to walk the walk and not just talk the talk. This leads to great opportunities to network, maintain the skills you've learned and work with an organization you are passionate about.

Article sourced from PR Ramp.

What working at a PR agency looks like, especially during a pandemic

This year has been challenging to say the least. When I wrapped up my graduate certificate program at Centennial College back in April, I had no idea where I would end up just a few months later. I had the opportunity to undergo my field placement at award-winning PR agency, Strategic Objective, and it was amazing!

Interning at SO gave me a first-hand experience at what agency life looks like - especially when working from home. With the exception of the three days I spent in office helping host an event, my internship took place virtually. All reporting, meetings and work was done through Microsoft Teams and Outlook.

Every day was different, but most days I was working somewhere between 7.5 to 12 hours. I had to ensure I was communicating frequently with the various teams - giving them an idea of what's on my plate. Needless to say, the days were packed, but that's part of why I was able to learn so much in such a short timespan.

Hands down, having gotten the experience to work in small teams to put together and execute national, award-winning campaigns with a reputable agency was the best part of my internship. I was able to learn so much about the Canadian media landscape and stay up-to-date on what stories the media is looking for and interested in - especially during a global pandemic.

My advice to students and new graduates starting out in an agency, plan your days ahead of time, communicate as much as possible, and remember to take frequent breaks. If you're feeling overwhelmed, talk to your teams and make sure you are only taking on as much work as you're able to handle.



As someone who never thought they would go into agency, I have to say this experience really felt like the best-case scenario. If you're looking for an understanding of what agency life looks like, SO will help you experience that - and then some. I look forward to taking everything I have learned at SO and applying it to my career, going forward.

By Mubashira Farooqi
CCPR graduate, Student of the Year

Article sourced from PR Ramp.



CCPR students and faculty being awarded by CPRS



Fall 2019 students being interviewed by CBC for their Storyworks project



CCPR students gain experience through hosting events



CCPR students executing a PR campaign

Preparing students for successful relationships with clients

In public relations, building a working relationship with your clients and employers is essential to your success. While there is no one size fits all, CCPR students are given a taste of the various dynamics, through working in teams and with clients on student projects such as events and Storyworks.

"Building resilience, professionalism, commitment to client service and responsiveness are all skills that are very hard to teach, until you can practice it on sort of a real client. So, we are giving students an opportunity to put into practice that which they've been learning by working with a real client," explained CCPR program director, Donna Lindell.

Founder of The GenWell Project, Pete Bombaci, has been a client on Storyworks projects since 2018 and commends CCPR students for doing work that actually matters. He revisited the moment the Fall 2019 class presented their proposal for the Face to Face February challenge, saying, "When they said that they were doing it because they wanted to make a difference in the lives of other students, I was sold."

Bombaci noted that in a workplace or when dealing with clients, showing that you care and are passionate about the work can go a far way.

"People want to work with people that they like, that they trust, and that are passionate and caring. So, if you understand and implement those types of thoughts into how you connect with people, then I think that's going to set you up for the greatest success as you move forward," Bombaci advised.

Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) - Toronto

The Canadian Public Relations Society is a national, non-profit association dedicated to the advancement of the public relations profession through the establishment and maintenance of high professional, educational and ethical standards.

CPRS Toronto conducts professional development events, seminars and networking opportunities and acts as a source of information for new developments in the profession and CPRS and have a direct link to PR students through their student steering committee. These services are all available to students members. Speak to your CCPR faculty to learn more.

International Association of Business Communicators (IABC)

Setting a standard of excellence since 1970, the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) is a vibrant global membership association with thousands of members from around the world, representing many of the Global Fortune 500 companies.

It is recognized as the professional association of choice for communicators who aspire to excel in their chosen fields, and is committed towards establishing and supporting the highest professional standards of quality and innovation in organizational communication. IABC offer services to students members such networking events, a job board and volunteer opportunities, available to student members. Speak to your faculty to learn more.

Starting building your network today!

PR Ramp - connecting PR students with industry experts

PR Ramp is a new public relations & communications association focused on assisting students from the ground up. Their flagship mentorship initiative puts newcomers to the field in contact with practitioners for a one-hour Zoom call.

Their roster of practitioners reflect the diversity of opportunities in the PR field. To be connect with a mentor, students and graduates (with two years or less professional experience) can e-mail PR Ramp at comms@prramp.com. Their team will contact you to discuss your concerns, ambitions and options and pair you with the professional most suited to address them.

PR Ramp is a student led organization, looking to learn from students and grads. They believe students have a lot to offer, and understand how daunting starting out can be. As such, they are on a mission to help aspiring practitioners acquire the best possible experience and really ramp up their career!

Information sourced from prramp.com

Participate in the CCPR Bingo challenge!

Complete the following tasks and share your results on social media. Challenge a friend, colleague or classmate to participate as well. Can you do it? That's right, Bingo!

Update your LinkedIn profile

Connect with a CCPR alumni

Attend a virtual networking event

Connect with a CCPR professor

**CCPR
BINGO**

Share an achievement on LinkedIn

Connect with a PR professional

Research the different PR sectors

Attend a virtual skill training event



Put your stories to work

Re - Imagine PR is an e-magazine produced a capstone project by Centennial College CCPR student, Ashraf Dabie. This magazine explores the unique elements of the CCPR program and how it has pivoted, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure students are successful and ready to take on the new world of PR.

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