



Dear PRSSA Chapter Members,

Fundamental to the practice of public relations is ethical behavior, which is responsible for building trusted relationships and respect among institutions and their constituencies. Ethical behavior is not only a professional obligation but also a personal commitment. Ethical behavior in public relations has captured national media attention with lapses by profit and not-for-profit organizations involving transparency disclosure. Such actions have escalated public concern about ethics in all areas of society – business, politics, local communities and daily life.

PRSSA is committed to professional ethics. As public relations pre-professionals and future leaders of the industry, the Society will focus on the idea of respectful communication. Each student brings his or her understanding of ethics and its practice to the campus, and then into the workplace, influencing colleagues and the institutions they will serve throughout a career lifetime. Unfortunately, unethical behavior often gets more play, but our dedication as professionals can rise above the roar.

As we celebrate our 40th anniversary, PRSSA founders have made ethical performance a requisite for members. Today, each member must pledge to uphold the PRSA Code of Ethics in pre-professional practice. In this way, all PRSSA students can represent the integrity of the profession to which they aspire. Today, Chapter members can become exemplars, leaders and advocates for ethics among their peers.

With an historic presidential election on the horizon for the upcoming year, PRSSA is launching the Fair & Ethical Campaigning (FEC) Initiative. The purpose of the Initiative is to address political public relations and ensure that candidates who influence public opinion uphold professional values including truth, advocacy, loyalty, expertise, fairness and public responsibility.

Each PRSSA Chapter will receive a resource guide on the Fair & Ethical Campaigning Initiative. This guide will cover the purpose, benefits and scope of the program, PRSSA/PRSA core principles, a Q & A section; and a sample press release about the Initiative to send to local media.

Please read the Fair & Ethical Campaigning Resource Guide to understand the Initiative and how your Chapter can successfully launch and implement the Initiative on your campus and in your community.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at the following email address: brandi.boatner@gmail.com. Good luck!

Sincerely,

Brandi Boatner
PRSSA Vice President of Advocacy
Hawai'i Pacific University

FAIR & ETHICAL CAMPAIGNING RESOURCE GUIDE

A.) Purpose

The purpose of the Initiative is to frame political public relations in line with candidates' influence upholding professional values including truth, advocacy, loyalty, expertise, fairness and public responsibility in their efforts to appeal to public opinion. The call to action is to have non-members of PRSSA sign a pledge to uphold professional values based on the PRSA Code of Ethics stating they will engage in fair and ethical campaigning when running for office on the collegiate, local, state and national level. We adopt and advocate the PRSA Code of Ethics as a model for other professions, organizations and professionals.

The Fair & Ethical Campaigning Initiative will focus on the free flow of information, competition, disclosure of information, safeguarding confidences and avoiding conflicts of interest. One of the core principles of the PRSA Code of Ethics is the free flow of accurate and truthful information as an essential component of serving the public interest and contributing to informed decision-making in a democratic society.

B.) Value & Benefits

PRSSA is committed to ethical practices. The year 2008 could be a historical presidential election year, and ethical campaigning is a key component not just for the presidential election but also for state and local elections. On the collegiate level, most colleges and universities have student organizations, fraternities and sororities and other activities that involve elections. As public relations pre-professionals and future leaders of the profession, it is essential to focus on putting ethics and setting ethical principles into action when dealing with the public. PRSSA members could influence candidates at every level to maintain ethical practices and uphold professional values.

In dealing with public trust, individuals must serve the public good and operate ethically. Professional and personal integrity and success, in fact, hinge on ethics. The value of signing the pledge to uphold professional values is to ensure the individual has made a commitment to maintain his or her pursuit of excellence with powerful standards of performance, professionalism and ethical conduct.

In addition, the Fair & Ethical Campaigning Initiative offers broad opportunities for member participation and potential positive media coverage for PRSSA Chapters nationwide.

Mark Twain once said, "Always tell the truth. You'll never have to remember what you said." In public relations, the ethical way is the only way.

C.) Significance of the Pledge

The Fair & Ethical Campaigning Initiative focuses on five core principles based on the PRSA Code of Ethics principles of conduct. Individuals who sign the pledge are expected to adhere to the following core principles.

CORE PRINCIPLES

1.) Free Flow of Information

- **Principle:** This core principle protects and advances the free flow of accurate and truthful information that is essential to serving the public interest and contributing to informed decision making in a democratic society.
- **Purpose:** The purpose is to maintain the integrity of relationships with the media, government officials, and the public.
- **Practice:** A candidate should be honest and accurate in all communications in order to preserve the integrity of the process of communication.

2.) Competition

- **Principle:** This core principle promotes respectful and fair competition thus preserving an ethical climate of intellectual property rights in the marketplace.
- **Purpose:** The purpose is to serve the public interest by providing the widest choice of practitioner options.
- **Practice:** Individuals should avoid spreading malicious and unfounded rumors about a competitor in order to alienate others from the competitor.

3.) Disclosure of Information

- **Principle:** This core principle fosters informed decision making in a democratic society of open communication.
- **Purpose:** The purpose is to build trust with the public by revealing all information needed for responsible decision-making.
- **Practice:** Individuals should avoid deceptive practices and should reveal the sponsors of causes and interests represented.

4.) Safeguarding Confidences

- **Principle:** This core principle requires appropriate protection of confidential and private information.
- **Purpose:** The purpose is to protect the privacy rights of organizations and individuals by safeguarding confidential information.
- **Practice:** An individual intentionally leaks proprietary information to the detriment of some other party.

5.) Conflicts of Interest

- **Principle:** This core principle aims to avoiding real, potential or perceived conflicts of interest thus building public trust.
- **Purpose:** The purpose is to earn trust and mutual respect with the public and other individuals.
- **Practice:** In order to build trust with the public, the individual should avoid or end situations that put one's personal or professional interests in conflict with Society's interests

- **Practice:** An individual should avoid actions and circumstances that may appear to compromise good business judgment or create a conflict between personal and professional interests.

The FEC Pledge

I pledge:

To conduct myself professionally, with truth, accuracy, fairness, and responsibility to the public and to adhere to the core principles of the Public Relations Student Society of America Code of Ethics for the practice of public relations as adopted from the Public Relations Society of America. I have read and understand the core principles.

I pledge my commitment to uphold the professional values, serve the public good and operate ethically.

Signature

Date

D.) Scope of the Program

The Fair & Ethical Campaigning Initiative was unveiled at the 2007 PRSSA National Conference in Philadelphia held on October 19-23, 2007. The program will begin in January 2008 and culminate in January 2009 after the nation's next President has been sworn into office.

Components of The Fair & Ethical Campaigning Initiative

- PRSSA Chapters will promote and generate awareness of fair and ethical campaigning practices throughout their campuses.
- PRSSA members will solicit non-members of PRSSA to sign the pledge to uphold professional values, stating they will uphold these values while seeking public opinion and the trust and votes of the public.
- PRSSA Chapters will work together with campus Political Science departments to host guest speakers and workshops regarding political public relations.

Question & Answer Section

Question: What are ethics?

The dictionary defines ethics as a system or set of moral principles and a branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct with respect to right, wrong, good, bad and responsibility.

Ethical behavior may seem simple, but individuals are faced with ethical dilemmas on a daily basis. Is it ethical to eavesdrop on a conversation? Do you tell your friend/significant other that

an outfit is unflattering to him or her? While there is no clear-cut universal guide on ethical behavior, every individual has the choice to act ethically and consider if he or she is being fair or honest.

Ask yourself questions like “Would I share this decision with my parents?” “Is what I did (or didn’t do) going to embarrass PRSSA, my university/school, my family or myself?”

Question: What are professional values?

The PRSSA Code of Ethics (adopted from the PRSA Code of Ethics) lists a set of values and provisions to which members must adhere. Professional values include truth, advocacy, loyalty, expertise, fairness and public responsibility.

Question: Why be Ethical?

Virtue is its own reward. There is an inner benefit and personal advantage to acting ethically. Ethical behavior also increases credibility and leads to approval. The universal ethical value of respect for others dictates honoring the dignity and autonomy of each person.

Examples of Unethical Behavior

- Cheating on an exam
- Plagiarism
- Lying on a resume
- Omitting facts

Question: Why should individuals sign the pledge?

The value of signing the pledge to uphold professional values is to ensure the individual has made a commitment to maintain his or her pursuit of excellence with powerful standards of performance, professionalism and ethical conduct.

Question: How can my Chapter launch this program on our campus?

PRSSA Chapters should identify and address campus elections such as student government elections, fraternity and sorority elections and other campus organization elections. Chapters can also address and identify local and statewide elections in their region.

PRSSA Chapters should co-sponsor events with campus organizations such as College Democrats and College Republicans to promote political public relations and the importance of ethics in campaigning.

Examples of Good and Bad Campaigning

- A young man running for fraternity president of Sigma Phi Rho purchases gifts for the members of his fraternity to influence their vote. **(Bad Campaigning)**
- The Sustainability Club on campus hosts an open forum for members running for positions on the student government association to address how they would make the campus more sustainable. **(Good Campaigning)**
- A local candidate for city council shares helpful information with the media regarding the business dealings and personal life of another city council candidate. **(Bad Campaigning)**

•A young woman running for hockey club vice president steps down from her position in the athletic department working with the university's hockey team. She does not want her job in the athletic department to conflict with her duties as hockey club vice president. (**Good Campaigning**)

WWPD: What would PRSSA Do?

•**Scenario 1:** The Green Party president on your campus calls the College Republicans an organization filled with lying control freaks. The president claims the College Republicans often withhold information and are not truthful about the practices of the candidates they support.

The Green Party president also states that the College Democrats throw fancy parties for members and also give expensive computer laptop bags to students if they join the organization and support the democratic candidates.

What should PRSSA do in this situation?

•**Scenario 2:** It's Greek Week at the University of Success. The Greek organizations are hosting various events on campus and electing new officers in their organizations. Sally is running for chapter president of ABC Sorority. She has unflattering photos of two of her sisters from the Wild, Wild West party who are also running for chapter president. She decides to post the photos on Facebook under an anonymous name.

Kip is running for president of XYZ fraternity. Kip creates a blog about why he should be elected. He encourages his brothers to visit the blog and share their thoughts. The blog receives more than 50 comments from his brothers and 48 of the comments were written by Kip under the name "XYZ Homie".

You are the PRSSA Advocacy Chair at your university or college. What advice would you give these candidates who are appealing to the public in order to gain public trust?

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE FOR INITIATIVE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jane College, PRSSA at Student's University

Students Launch Nationwide Program To Promote Ethical Political Communications

***“Fair & Ethical Campaigning Initiative” Aims to Infuse
Public Relations Ethics into Campus, Local and National Elections***

Anytown, USA (March XX, 2008) – Members of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) have launched a nationwide initiative that will pledge students to promulgate ethical principles to guide the political process. *The Fair & Ethical Campaigning Initiative* (FEC) establishes core ethics principles for participating students to adopt and promote for campus, local, state and national political campaigns. The FEC code to which the pledges are derived from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Code of Ethics, the industry standard for ethical behavior for the public relations profession.

“In this presidential election year, political discourse and election messaging take on a heightened level of attention and importance that should be matched with a focus on principles of ethical communication,” said Melissa Csuhran, PRSSA National President. “From fraternity elections, to city and state contests, to the presidential campaign, all political communication should be fair, open, honest, and respectful to maintain the integrity of the democratic process.”

The Fair & Ethical Campaigning program will parallel the presidential election cycle, extending through January 2009. As the primary season continues to unfold, increasingly public relations students are getting involved with the election process. PRSSA members who pledge to the principles of the FEC program seek to encourage candidates to join them in engaging these professional values in their campaigns.

The FEC program reflects the mission of PRSSA, which is a non-partisan student organization committed to ethical practices when dealing with public interest and public trust. Under the program, PRSSA members will also solicit non-members of PRSSA to sign the fair and ethical pledge to uphold these values while courting public support, trust, and votes.

The pledge is a visible commitment to uphold professional values and to maintain the pursuit of excellence with powerful standards of performance, professionalism and ethical conduct. With

this program, PRSSA Chapters nationwide will promote and generate awareness of fair and ethical campaigning practices throughout their campus and communities.

<Add paragraph here about campaigning going on in their cities and on their campus>

About the Public Relations Student Society of America

Celebrating its 40th anniversary, the Public Relations Student Society of America (www.prssa.org) is the world's pre-eminent, pre-professional public relations organization. Founded in 1968 by its parent Society, PRSA, the organization has grown to more than 9,800 members and 292 Chapters at colleges and universities in 43 states, the District of Columbia and Argentina.

###