

# Diversity Toolkit

March 2015



Dear PRSSA members:

In 2005, the PRSSA National Committee launched a Diversity Initiative to support our Society's dedication to recruiting a diverse membership. PRSSA continues its commitment to promoting diversity in public relations with benefits such as minority student scholarships, Diversity Month and editorial content on the subject of diversity. All these things help us work toward a better Society, but there is more to be done. The implantation of new diversity programing and participation in the national Diversity Initiative can help our Society recruit a diverse membership.

The enclosed toolkit contains information for Chapters to promote diversity on their campuses. The Diversity Toolkit is not a solution for inequality or injustice on college campuses; however, the toolkit does address common problems with diversity and offers suggestions on how Chapters can become socially sustainable.

We welcome all individuals to join PRSSA and freely express themselves in our Society. We understand that it is through a pool of different perspectives and backgrounds that we achieve success. By having a Society full of diverse leaders, we can build stronger professional and personal relationships within our industry and our communities.

Carefully read the materials in this packet and evaluate your Chapter's practices in recruitment, retention and member satisfaction and how these practices may be improved by implementing a diversity initiative of your own. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. Let's continue to strive for excellence in all we do.

Sincerely,

Eric M. Winkfield  
PRSSA 2014-2015 Vice President of Advocacy

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## Diversity Toolkit

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## Section 1: Contents

### 1.1 Introduction

The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) is dedicated in its efforts to welcome and maintain a diverse membership. We embrace members regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, or age.

The following toolkit aims to improve members' overall understanding of diversity within PRSSA and to serve as a template for Chapters in recruiting, understanding, supporting, maintaining and promoting diversity at their universities.

### 1.2 Official Position on Diversity

PRSSA recognizes the importance of different experiences, perspectives and voices in making a viable Society that aids the profession and future professionals in serving diverse and increasingly multicultural publics. Furthermore, all PRSSA members are expected to uphold the pillars of professionalism, advancement and ethical behavior clearly defined in the PRSA Code of Ethics, to ensure a noble progression of advocacy through the public relations field.

### 1.3 Diversity Initiative (2014)

The PRSSA National Committee launched a Diversity Initiative in 2005. The Diversity Initiative states that PRSSA encourages Chapters to recruit and retain diverse membership and leadership representative of the demographic composition at their college or university. Read the full Diversity Initiative on our Diversity [Web page](#).

## Section 2: Diverse Programming

The [PRSA Diversity Committee](#) is a great resource for developing diverse programming and event ideas. The following is a sample of programming ideas and topics provided by PRSA Chapters and Districts and the PRSSA National Committee.

To better understand how PRSSA defines diversity, see section 3 before reading section 2.

### 2.1 Sample Programming Ideas and Events

- **Diversity and Inclusion Managers**  
Many of today's businesses hire experts to serve as directors, vice presidents and managers of diversity to lead companies in recruiting and retaining diverse candidates. Reach out to some of these individuals to see if they can offer your Chapter's executive board insights for recruiting and retaining diverse members. In addition, invite one of these managers to speak to your campus' human resources and public relations students.
- **Visits to Non-Public Relations Classes**  
To recruit PRSSA members outside the public relations major, visit classes in majors such as marketing, advertising, graphic design and journalism. During the visit, discuss what public relations is and how the specific major you are speaking with can benefit from learning more about the public relations profession. At the end of the discussion, invite the students to your next meeting.
- **Diversity and Human Resources**  
Work with your campuses' Office of Human Resources to create a program that discusses employee communications and communicating with diverse employees on campus. Also, partner with a local HR organization (e.g. Society for Human Resource Management) in your area and invite them to speak about their experiences with employee relations and diversity in local companies.
- **Communicating across cultures**  
Our language is filled with interesting colloquialisms and metaphors. But some of these words and phrases can be hurtful to people of certain ethnicities, religions or other groups. Co-sponsor a writing and language workshop with journalism students or the Press Club on your campus to learn some of the ways people inadvertently use offensive language – and suggest more appropriate ways to get your message across.
- **Public Relations Chairs/ Directors**  
Various organizations on your campus have public relations officers or chairs. A good way to recruit and retain new members is to reach out to those organizations and communicate the benefit of the public relations chairs being part of PRSSA to learn how to better serve in their roles. Also consider hosting a workshop for this audience.

- **School Spirit**  
Co-sponsor a workshop with student athletes and the athletics department media relations office on your campus. At the workshop, discuss how your university's sports teams are being promoted and how student athletes feel about their image and the image of university athletics. The results could lead to a campaign led by your student-run firm. Promote PRSSA membership to any athletes interested in combining their passion for sports with a communications career.
- **Greek Life: Image is Everything**  
Host a workshop with fraternity and sorority communications chairs and committee members to identify topics such as reputation management, crisis communication and publicity/public relations. Most Greek organizations have public relations officers or programming chairs. Your PRSSA Chapter could offer suggestions on how to best communicate their organization's message to the student body.
- **Students with Disabilities**  
Co-sponsor an event with the Center for Students with Disabilities on your campus. The event could be a partnership with an existing organization in your area such as the Special Olympics. Your Chapter could also generate awareness about the Center for Students with Disabilities by offering public relations services such as news releases.
- **Lifestyle Magazines and Publications**  
Lifestyle magazines are a burgeoning market, particularly in the LGBT community. Host a roundtable discussion between communications professionals from gay/lesbian-oriented lifestyle magazines, your PRSSA Chapter and LGBT campus organizations.
- **Empowering Women**  
Invite faculty from your campus' women's studies department and local businesswomen to discuss the promotion of women in today's organizations and how females in leadership positions affect diversity in the workplace.
- **Language & Communication**  
Do Latino audiences prefer Spanish to English? What is the preferred language by Chinese-Americans? How many dialects do Chinese-Americans speak, and which is politically correct to use in public relations? Host a guest speaker series co-sponsored with a campus organization for international students that addresses questions about language and communication, both on- and off-campus.
- **Crisis Case Study**  
Host a workshop or competition where professionals describe a crisis or challenge they faced within an ethnic market (e.g. Nike racial discrimination suit). Have participants offer solutions for the crisis before the real-life solution is presented.

- **Challenges of Diversity**  
Partner with your area's largest public and private employers to discuss the different diversity challenges they have faced, especially those related to communications.
- **Working with Ethnic Public Relations**  
Ask corporate/governmental practitioners to be guest speakers on your campus and discuss how they work with ethnic public relations agencies, ethnic initiatives, and ethnic campaigns.
- **Emerging Markets**  
Host a discussion with your local PRSA Chapter that addresses emerging business markets. Discuss the different opportunities the emerging markets can provide for public relations professionals.
- **Ethnic Radio**  
This is a powerful and often overlooked medium. Try to identify ethnic radio markets in your area and invite members of the station to speak to your Chapter regarding ethnic radio and how public relations professionals can use it to reach diverse audiences.
- **Perceptions**  
What are the changes experienced by today's ethnic communities? Hold a discussion regarding issues of perceptions of certain ethnic groups and how to communicate when differences exist, both in-person and in public relations campaigns. Invite diversity officers from businesses in the area to be guest speakers.
- **Ethnic Conferences in Public Relations**  
There are groups designed for public relations students and professionals who belong to certain ethnic groups. These groups often host conferences. Reach out to these groups to gather a list of potential events your members can attend, as well as to gain feedback and perspectives on how to engage with different groups on your campus.
- **International Chapter Connections**  
PRSSA currently has three international Chapters in Argentina, Colombia and Perú. If you have members with connections or an interest in these countries, encourage them to reach out to those Chapters to learn how public relations differs in South American countries — or ask one of the Chapters' members to Skype into a meeting.

These are just a few topics you can cover to bring the value of diversity to your members. Reach out to your local PRSA Chapter or PRSSA Vice President of Advocacy Eric M. Winkfield at [eric1.winkfield@famu.edu](mailto:eric1.winkfield@famu.edu) for more ideas and to discuss how to make these programs work for your Chapter.

## Section 3: Understanding Diversity

### 3.1 Defining Diversity

The term *diversity* suggests a variety of categorical definitions such as race, nationality, gender or sexual orientation. PRSSA expands this definition to mean any differences that exist among people. Diversity can be divided into primary and secondary dimensions. Primary characteristics are innate and cannot be changed. These include gender, age, ethnicity, race, nationality, sexual orientation, etc. Secondary characteristics can be altered. These include marital status, education (major/minor), religion, etc.

To better serve members and our publics, it is beneficial to recruit individuals who bring a fresh perspective to our membership. The following groups are helpful to recruit:

- Students in related communication fields, such as advertising, journalism or marketing
- Students in non-communication fields such as political science and psychology
- Males (PRSSA is predominantly female)
- Members of ethnic and cultural minority groups
- International students
- Students with disabilities
- Student athletes
- Members of the LGBT community
- Non-traditional students

PRSSA does not suggest any type of affirmative action or other racial profiling system for member recruitment. The Society respects and values all members' personal contributions and talents regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities and religion.

### 3.2. The Role of Diversity in PRSSA

Beyond race and religion, diversity refers to a variety of characteristics. PRSSA defines its role in diversity as follows:

*To expand the objectives of this Society while actively recruiting and retaining members who can offer a variety of experiences through a broad spectrum of racial, ethnic, religious and sexual-orientation groups. The Society aims to encourage the educational success of our members in order to provide the professional world with educated, diverse students to form strong and effective relationships with a global society.*

It is important for Chapter leaders to show a strong commitment to diversity in order to gain member support. To support your diversity initiative, consider electing a diversity or advocacy chair, or creating a diversity subcommittee to provide support within the Chapter. Continue to evaluate your Chapter's progress as you pursue a diversity initiative.

Form partnerships and relationships with multicultural groups on campus to work together to achieve and accomplish Chapter goals and objectives. Try to co-sponsor a diversity-focused event with other organizations and invite diverse panels of speakers to attend your meetings.



### 3.3 Diversity vs. Culture

Often diversity is mistaken for culture because certain aspects of diversity such as race and nationality do have their own cultures. To help understand the differences:

Culture	Diversity
Norms	Characteristics
Beliefs and Values	Innate traits
Determines behavior	Can control behavior
Can create conflicts in communication styles	Proactive integration of multiple cultures to decrease conflicts

### 3.4 Maintaining Diversity

#### The S.I.I.P. Method: Survey, Identify, Implement and Personalize

Before implementing a diversity plan, a Chapter must evaluate the diversity that already exists within the Chapter. Take a look at your Chapter and think about how it represents your student body, our Society, your state and the country. What areas does your Chapter lack in membership and why? How can you remedy these areas?

#### STEP 1: SURVEY

You should evaluate a large group of members. Leaders could spend a meeting conducting a brainstorm session asking the above-mentioned questions, or a survey could be emailed to the members. Chapters must get individual members involved in the discussion for accurate feedback. New members are especially valuable in sharing why they joined PRSSA and why the Chapter has its current retention rate.

#### STEP 2: IDENTIFY

Identify specific challenges and opportunities for your Chapter's diversity initiative and share them with all Chapter members. Diversity can be a sensitive subject, and some students may be hesitant to discuss their opinions. However, certain issues pertaining to diversity within the Chapter must be addressed to clearly and openly define and evaluate how a diverse membership will be valuable to the Chapter.

#### STEP 3: IMPLEMENT

Start an open dialogue with your Chapter and the national vice president of advocacy about your plans and progress as you implement a diversity plan. What are your specific needs and goals, and how will you reach them? What is your progress in reaching your goals?

#### STEP 4: PERSONALIZE

For PRSSA Chapters, much of the diversity initiative focuses on recruitment. Members should appeal to the needs of non-traditional groups on campus to establish a relationship with the members of those groups. Once these relationships have been established, the Chapter must find a way to personalize a local diversity initiative.