Professionalising public relations:

A history of Australian public relations education, 1985–1999

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Murdoch University in 2014.
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

..............................................

Catherine Fitch
Abstract

This thesis is concerned with public relations education in Australia. It focuses on 1985–1999, as in these years there was significant growth in education and the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) sought greater regulation and jurisdiction over public relations activity. Existing historical scholarship focuses on the evolution of the Australian public relations industry towards professional status, and tertiary education is perceived to confirm the field’s professional standing. In contrast, I consider the development of public relations education in a broader social context and the involvement of the PRIA in tertiary education.

This thesis aims to investigate the role of public relations education in the professionalisation of public relations in Australia. It uses a qualitative approach, combining archival research, focusing on the previously unstudied archives of the PRIA’s National Education Committee, and interviews with practitioners and educators. This thesis provides an analysis of how, and why, the PRIA sought to regulate public relations education. The use of historical sociology allows the findings to be interpreted in relation to broader societal structures and institutional processes, such as the expansion of the Australian higher education sector, the PRIA’s preoccupation with professional status, and the increase in female practitioners.

In developing a critical account of Australian public relations education, this thesis argues that higher education was pivotal to the PRIA’s professional project. The findings confirm the constitution of public relations knowledge and its institutionalisation in the Australian academy were dynamic and contested, and that the PRIA’s professional drive informed its attempts to regulate the transmission of that knowledge. A significant finding
is the ambivalent attitudes towards gender and education, given the increasing number of female graduates. These findings contribute a unique Australian perspective to the global public relations scholarship on history and professionalisation and allow a reconceptualisation of the development of public relations in Australia.
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I also thank Lorenza Minghetti, Executive Officer, and Katharina Wolf, former President, of PRIA (WA) for allowing me access to the unsorted boxes holding the PRIA (WA) archives, stored in Lorenza’s garage. I thank Julian Kenny at PRIA (National) for his assistance in facilitating permission to use the uncatalogued PRIA (National) and PRIA (NSW) archives recently provided to the Mitchell Library, in the State Library of New South Wales, and the PRIA (WA) archives in this research.

I am forever grateful to the 14 key informants who enthusiastically and willingly participated in this research. All participants were generous in sharing their perceptions and memories, and in forwarding additional newspaper cuttings, newsletters, resumes, biographies, and articles from their personal archives. In particular, I thank Marjorie Anderson for her preservation of the PRIA’s National Education Committee archives, her interest in this research, and for permission to use these archives. I also thank Professor David Potts for loaning me his copy of the PRIA-commissioned report, *Public relations education in Australia* (Quarles & Potts, 1990).

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the interviews, originally conducted to investigate gender and public relations, in order to
examine more fully the development of public relations education in Australia.

A final note on the referencing style in this thesis: I have chosen to use the APA
(6th ed.) style as it is common in my discipline. Given the historical nature of the research
reported in this thesis, I use footnotes for content and archival source material.

I also thank my family: Damian, Hannah, and Tobyn for their unstinting support
and indeed interest in this project.
Publications and Presentations Resulting from this Research

I developed the ideas in this thesis through publications and conference presentations during my candidature. To date, I have published four journal articles based on thesis chapters and emerging findings and, in addition, co-authored a journal article and a book chapter that informed the research reported in this thesis. The Murdoch University policy allows for co-authored work (see Graduate Research Degree Regulations, Clause 81.3) to contribute to dissertations. I have also presented conference papers based on various chapters and emerging findings during the course of my candidature, and note below where these presentations have undergone peer review.

Refereed journal articles


on parts of Chapter 2 and the findings relating to international public relations education in Asia reported in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.


*Prism, 7*(4). Retrieved from http://www.prismjournal.org/fileadmin/Praxis/Files/Gender/Fitch_Third.pdf This article investigated the impact of gender in the Australian public relations industry, and informed sections of Chapters 1, 2, and 6.

**Refereed book chapter**

Fitch, K., & Third, A. (2014). Feminization and professionalization in the Australian public relations industry. In C. Daymon & K. Demetrious (Eds.), *Gender and public relations: Critical perspectives on voice, image and identity* (pp. 247–268). Abingdon, England: Routledge. This book chapter draws on interviews with six participants regarding their experiences in, and perceptions of, the public relations industry. In Chapter 6, I analyse these interviews, in conjunction with interviews with eight other participants, to investigate public relations education.

**Refereed conference presentations**

Communication Association, London, England. This paper reflects on the limitations of interview research methodology, as discussed in Chapter 3.

**Non-refereed conference presentations (abstract peer review)**

Fitch, K. (2013, June). Perceptions of Australian public relations education in the 1990s. Paper presented at the meeting of International Association for Media and Communication Research, Dublin, Eire. This paper draws on the findings reported in Chapter 6.


Fitch, K. (2012, November). An investigation of the Public Relations Institute of Australia’s accreditation of university courses in the 1990s. In R. Crawford (Chair),
PR and the past in local and international contexts: A roundtable symposium.

Symposium conducted at University Technology Sydney (UTS), Sydney, Australia.

This paper draws on the findings reported in Chapter 4.
### List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACA</td>
<td>Australian Communication Association (from 1994, ANZCA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJA</td>
<td>Australian Journalists Association (from 1992, MEAA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APBC</td>
<td>Australian Progressive Business College</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANZCA</td>
<td>Australia and New Zealand Communication Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAE</td>
<td>College of Advanced Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAMSA</td>
<td>Council of Australian Marketing Service Associations</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPE</td>
<td>Continuing professional education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSU</td>
<td>Charles Sturt University (established in 1989, out of merger of Mitchell College of Advanced Education and other institutes of higher education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECU</td>
<td>Edith Cowan University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPRIA</td>
<td>Fellow of the Public Relations Institute of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IABC</td>
<td>International Association of Business Communicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAP2</td>
<td>International Association of Public Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHPRC</td>
<td>International History of Public Relations Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPR</td>
<td>Institute of Public Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPRA</td>
<td>International Public Relations Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEAA</td>
<td>Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPRIA</td>
<td>Member of the Public Relations Institute of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEC</td>
<td>National Education Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>State of New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRIA</td>
<td>Public Relations Institute of Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRSA</td>
<td>Public Relations Society of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>QIT</td>
<td>Queensland Institute of Technology (from 1989, Queensland University of Technology; from 1990, QUT)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (granted university status in 1992)</td>
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<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>State of Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUT</td>
<td>Queensland University of Technology (established 1989 out of the merger of QIT and various colleges of advanced education; from 1990 known as QUT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNSW</td>
<td>University of New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>UTS</td>
<td>University of Technology Sydney (since 1988; formerly New South Wales Institute of Technology)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UWA</td>
<td>University of Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>State of Victoria</td>
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<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>State of Western Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>WACAE</td>
<td>Western Australian College of Advanced Education (from 1991, Edith Cowan University)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WAIT</td>
<td>Western Australian Institute of Technology (from 1987, Curtin University of Technology)</td>
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Introduction

One of my students on placement in a public relations consultancy was sent “undercover” to participate in a community activist meeting. The student was expected to report back to the consultancy whose client was the subject of the meeting. This act troubled me, as it placed the student in a vulnerable situation, was deceptive, and was possibly in breach of the Public Relations Institute of Australia’s (PRIA) Code of Ethics. As I pondered possible responses, I realised this incident reveals the complexity of the relationship between the public relations industry and the university sector. Internships and work experience opportunities are essential for industry accreditation. It had taken years to negotiate placements for students from my university in this particular consultancy and some graduates had been offered employment as a result. In a subsequent conversation, the student told me they felt unable to refuse the request to attend the meeting, as they too hoped to be offered employment. This incident helped crystallise some ideas around the different priorities of public relations practitioners and educators and the gap between the professional rhetoric of the PRIA, the activities of some of its members and other public relations practitioners, and the public relations curriculum. In turn, these thoughts led me to question the relationship between the public relations industry and the higher education sector. These concerns led to the research reported in this thesis.

I have taught public relations in the university sector since 2001. I started as a part-time tutor and associate lecturer, while working as a public relations consultant in arts and government sectors, before I gained fulltime employment in 2003 as a lecturer in Murdoch University’s mass communication program. In 2006, I developed a public relations major as part of a new Bachelor of Communication, which subsequently gained PRIA
accreditation. I received university and national teaching awards for my focus on work-integrated learning in the public relations curriculum. This degree is now taught in four countries: Australia, Dubai, Malaysia, and Singapore. I have researched and published on various topics related to public relations education: work-integrated learning (Fitch, 2011); transnational and international education (Fitch, 2013a; Fitch & Desai, 2012; Fitch & Surma, 2006); and teaching ethics (Fitch, 2012, 2013b). The significance for the research reported in this thesis is that I have worked as a public relations educator for more than a decade and reflected on the challenges of teaching public relations in a dynamic higher education environment. I bring this experience to the research reported in this thesis.

Although it is not the focus of this research, I am interested in a critical pedagogy for public relations that identifies links between teaching and practice, challenges hegemonic thinking, and connects knowledge to power. Critical public relations scholars have identified that public relations pedagogy is underpinned by a conduit model around the transmission of knowledge (Willis & McKie, 2011), adopts an instrumentalist view of knowledge resulting in technocratic and managerial approaches (Somerville, Purcell, & Morrison, 2011), and lacks conceptual frameworks for challenging disciplinary frameworks (Motion & Burgess, 2014). Motion and Burgess, for example, seek ways to teach public relations that “challenge and critique understandings of public relations as a media-oriented discipline in which spin and persuasion are deployed to benefit the dominant coalition” (2014, p. 1). Somerville, Purcell, and Morrison (2011) identify that a preoccupation with industry relevance informs public relations textbooks and education; while they recognise the need for vocational content, they also call for greater emphasis on social, political, cultural, and ethical contexts.
The PRIA (2012d, 2013b) accredits 27 undergraduate and 25 postgraduate public relations courses at 18 universities in Australia. Education is integral to the professional project, defining the domain and body of knowledge and regulating the membership of the professional association (L’Etang, 2008a). I am interested in exploring the links between education and practice. This thesis therefore offers an historical perspective on the development of public relations, focusing on the institutionalisation of Australian public relations education in universities and the introduction of a standardised, national accreditation program by the PRIA in 1991. This historical research is significant because it seeks to understand how certain discourses around public relations education became dominant and how particular social and historical contexts contributed to the constitution of a public relations body of knowledge in Australia. Such understandings are necessary in order to develop a critical pedagogy for public relations.

The aim of this thesis is thus to investigate the role of public relations education in the professionalisation of public relations in Australia. In particular, this thesis considers the role of the professional association, the PRIA, through the formal accreditation of university courses in the 1990s, in defining industry expectations of education. It is worth noting that until now, the PRIA’s accreditation criteria for university courses have had only minor modifications since the introduction of national accreditation in 1991. Using an historical sociological approach foregrounding professionalisation, knowledge and, to a lesser extent, gender, I consider in this thesis the PRIA’s role in public relations education in Australia in the late 1980s and 1990s, when student and course numbers increased significantly. From the perspective of the PRIA, education was a key professionalisation strategy for the public relations industry. However, as I demonstrate in this thesis, public
relations education is underpinned by a contested body of knowledge variously drawn from practitioner and industry understandings, which tend to be functionalist and framed within a professional discourse, and from diverse academic perspectives, which may adopt, or (less commonly) contest, understandings drawn from practitioner perspectives. For example, understandings of ethical practice in industry are orientated towards the client, profit, and competitive advantage yet public relations educators may choose to highlight the broader social role of public relations (Breit & Demetrious, 2010; Fitch, 2011, 2013a). Examining this “contest” over the role of public relations education and the public relations body of knowledge offers a nuanced and dynamic account of the development of public relations and public relations education in Australia. An historical perspective allows insights into how particular discourses of Australian public relations emerged and became prominent. It reveals the significance of contemporary perspectives and discussions around public relations education.

I argue in this thesis public relations remains dominated by a paradigm that is functionalist and normative and this paradigm continues to frame expectations of public relations education. As my interest is more broadly public relations in society, I adopt a critical approach to challenge existing assumptions and mainstream understandings by exploring the tensions between education, practice, and society. Drawing on PRIA archives, including previously unstudied archives of the PRIA’s National Education Committee (NEC), and interviews with practitioners and educators, many of whom were involved in establishing and developing public relations as a course of study in Australian higher education in the 1980s and 1990s, I present an historical account of the development of Australian public relations education. I develop a critical history by analysing the
contexts in which particular discourses of public relations emerged to understand how certain paradigms and discourses, particularly in relation to education, remain prominent. The dominant paradigm for public relations, which emerged out of large-scale industry funded studies in the US and later Anglo-American countries, has had a significant impact on public relations scholarship and teaching across the globe. I argue that standard historical narratives, shaped by this paradigm, have led to an uncritical and somewhat unproblematic understanding of public relations, presenting its steady progress towards professional status and ignoring historical contexts.

This thesis offers an alternative to these narratives by considering the impact of societal and structural factors on the institutionalisation of public relations in the academy. I thus investigate public relations education in Australia in the late 1980s and 1990s and its role as a professionalisation strategy for the professional association, that is, as “an instrument for the public relations occupation to achieve [professional] status” (Pieczka & L’Etang, 2006, p. 276). I explore the contests around the constitution of public relations knowledge in the Australian context and consider unique political and social factors that influenced public relations education and defined the public relations curriculum. These factors include the massification and increasing vocationalisation and marketisation of Australian higher education, rivalry with co-emerging fields of study and practice, and the professionalisation drive of the professional association. Emerging from this thesis is evidence that the growth in public relations education in Australia served both the industry’s professionalisation drive and the needs of a rapidly expanding higher education sector. That is, I argue the growth of public relations education in the Australian higher education sector in the late 1980s and 1990s must be understood in terms of its historical
context. As my research is embedded in the archives of the professional association and reconstructed and retrospective memories of educators and practitioners, many of whom were active in the professional association, a critical approach is required to avoid adopting the ideals of the professional project. In addition, the findings reported in this thesis raise broader questions around the constitution of public relations knowledge and the impact of particular paradigms and research methodologies on the theoretical development of public relations.

**Thesis Structure**

The first two chapters examine public relations through analysis of professional narratives found in PRIA and Australian newspaper archives and through recent public relations scholarship. Chapter 1 considers the rise of public relations and its preoccupation with professionalism. It draws on recent scholarship of public relations historiography to understand how professional discourses position public relations, and indeed, traditional public relations scholarship, somewhat uncritically as a corporate function, framing the field as progressive and linear while failing to embed these understandings of public relations in particular social and political contexts.

Chapter 2 focuses on public relations education. It develops the themes identified in Chapter 1, including the tension between industry and the academy around the role and functions of public relations education, and documents the emergence of public relations as a course of study in Australian higher education. It identifies a number of local, national, and global factors, which have influenced its development. These include competition and rivalry with other emerging fields of study, the influence of industry, through formal processes such as the introduction of accreditation and less formally through the
involvement of practitioners and former practitioners in the development and teaching of public relations courses. Significant changes in Australian higher education in recent decades have resulted in an increased focus on vocational courses, offering opportunities for the growth of public relations education and changing the relationship between industry and the academy. This chapter establishes the need to explore the involvement of the professional association in public relations education in the higher education sector.

Chapter 3 outlines the design of the research reported in this thesis. In order to investigate the ways in which the PRIA understood the role of, and attempted to regulate, public relations education in Australia, I conducted research in PRIA archives, focusing on the PRIA’s introduction of a national accreditation program for university courses. I also interviewed 14 practitioners and educators regarding their experiences of the public relations industry and public relations education, with a particular focus on the 1980s and 1990s. I combine analysis of interviews with archival research, offering an in-depth, thematic analysis within an historical narrative in order to convey the complex shifts and challenges to the emergence and subsequent development of public relations as a course of study in higher education, and, in tandem, the constitution of public relations knowledge. I draw on themes and sub-themes, which emerge from my analysis, to determine the various priorities for, and expectations of, public relations education. These themes broadly relate to the relationship between education and professionalisation and the constitution of public relations knowledge. I identify limitations of archival and interview research and discuss how I address reliability and validity in this qualitative study.

Having established the context for the introduction and growth of public relations as a university course in Chapters 1 and 2, and the design of the research reported in this
thesis in Chapter 3, the next three chapters draw on primary research to investigate the experiences, concerns, and priorities of educators, practitioners, and the professional association. Chapters 4 and 5 analyse the personal archives of the NEC chair of the 1990s, Marjorie Anderson, in order to understand the interaction between the professional association and universities in relation to the industry accreditation of university courses. Analysis of this interaction reveals diverse understandings of the role of public relations education and the public relations curriculum. The NEC, established in 1990, was responsible for the inaugural national accreditation of university courses. Anderson chaired the committee for a decade and oversaw two five-year accreditation rounds in that time. Although endorsement and even accreditation of public relations courses had occurred prior to 1990, this “accreditation” varied from state to state and had not been standardised throughout Australia, despite PRIA national council endorsement of state decisions. Analysis of the correspondence between the chair, NEC members, state council members, and universities, file notes, and subcommittee reports reveals the priorities and concerns of the professional association, and, in particular, their expectations of public relations education. Given the unique access to these previously unstudied archives, this in-depth analysis is covered in two chapters. Chapter 4 examines the correspondence in relation to the introduction of the PRIA’s first national accreditation program in 1991 and the first accreditation round (1992–1996). The initial responsibility for assessing accreditation applications in the second round (1997–2001) was devolved to state-based committees, resulting in a shift in PRIA’s priorities for public relations education. Chapter 5 reports the findings in relation to the analysis of archives relating to the second round.
Chapter 6 draws on 14 in-depth interviews conducted in 2010–2012 with educators and practitioners. Interview participants include members of the PRIA’s NEC in the 1990s, members of state councils who worked closely with individual universities in developing public relations courses, practitioners who taught part-time in universities, and educators, course directors, and school deans who established and developed public relations as a course of study in their institutions. Analysis of these interviews offers diverse insights into the priorities and concerns that informed the development of public relations education in Australia.

The final chapter discusses the implications of these findings for understanding both public relations and public relations education. I explore the implications of the preoccupation with professional status for public relations education and how practitioners’ expectations and understandings of the constitution of public relations expertise and knowledge have played out in the interaction between industry and the academy. Throughout this study, I have endeavoured to ensure that my findings promote a stronger understanding of public relations and the role of education. In offering new perspectives on the development of public relations, I challenge mainstream understandings and encourage educators to redefine the scope and aims of tertiary public relations education beyond meeting industry needs. I also reflect on the significance of my findings, the research design, and the implications for future research.
Chapter 1: The Professionalisation of Public Relations

Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of public relations as a professional project. Its focus is the professionalisation of public relations, drawing on recent scholarship on public relations historiography and sociological writing on the professions. I argue in this chapter there is a significant gap in the public relations literature in terms of how public relations associations attempt to develop professional legitimacy, despite the field’s preoccupation with its professional status. This preoccupation has led to normative histories, which present public relations history as a linear progression towards an ethical profession. I introduce widely accepted accounts of Australian public relations history, produced and reproduced in interviews, memoirs, industry publications, and textbooks, to demonstrate how these histories frame Australian public relations history as an evolutionary development towards professional status and shape particular conceptualisations of public relations knowledge.

This chapter therefore considers the historical narratives of public relations and the public relations industry’s preoccupation with professionalism, with a focus on the Australian context. The chapter is structured in five sections. In the first section, I introduce the Australian public relations industry and the PRIA, whose mission is to promote the professional standing of public relations. I then present the PRIA’s definition of public relations and note its origin in US textbooks. In the second section, I present textbook histories of public relations in Australia. I discuss Australian public relations history, drawing on textbook understandings, practitioner memoirs, and industry narratives to illustrate how these histories reveal a steady progression towards professionalism. I also
draw on PRIA archives, industry newsletters, and mainstream media in the 1980s and 1990s to demonstrate concerns about the field’s professional status. In the third section, I introduce the dominant paradigm for public relations and acknowledge its significance for the ways public relations is researched and theorised. In the fourth section, I review recent scholarship on public relations historiography and the ways in which particular histories and ideologies, and in particular, the dominant, functionalist paradigm, have framed the development of public relations. I identify the need for more critical histories of public relations. In the final section, I introduce public relations as a professional project drawing on critical scholarship on the sociology of the professions. I discuss the implications for public relations and the need to understand the significance for the constitution and institutionalisation of public relations knowledge. Finally, I identify education as a key mechanism in the professionalisation of public relations in Australia that requires further research.

Public Relations in Australia

The state of Australian public relations. The PRIA aims to develop the industry’s professional status; its mission states it “is dedicated to promoting and enhancing the public relations and communications profession to the broader community” (PRIA, 2012a, p. 2; 2013a, p. 2). However, it is difficult to find precise information on the size, in terms of employment figures, of the public relations industry in Australia. The PRIA (2010a) drew on Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] data to state 14,600 people were employed in public relations in 2009. However, a recent industry report suggests only 4360 people are employed in the public relations industry in Australia, noting that public relations is less volatile and less affected by the global downturn than industries such as advertising
Further, PRIA membership is not strongly representative of the industry. The PRIA (2010a) estimated, for example, that only one in five public relations practitioners is a member.

Recent PRIA annual reports offer conflicting information regarding membership trends. For instance, the PRIA reported in 2012 that individual membership had grown 63% over the previous seven years, increasing from 1668 in 2005 to 2733 in 2011/12 (2012a, p. 2). In the same report, the PRIA noted that “membership has remained steady during 2011/12” and yet somewhat contradictorily: “during what has been a very hard year for membership based organisations, the PRIA has managed to maintain member numbers nationally with only a 2% decrease in membership” (PRIA, 2012a, p. 4). The PRIA’s most recent annual report acknowledges that membership revenue declined by 11% to $651,116 for the year ended June 30, 2013, confirming a downward trend (PRIA, 2013a, p. 6); in the previous year, membership revenue was $733,476 (PRIA, 2012c, p. 20).

This lack of clarity in public relations industry employment figures and the poor industry representation, reflected in the PRIA’s acknowledgement of its low membership rate, point to a widespread challenge regarding the PRIA’s capacity to regulate public relations work. The lack of industry representation among PRIA membership is also a challenge for the regulation of the industry in terms of ethical practice (Burton, 2007; de Bussy & Wolf, 2009; van Ruler, 2005) and suggests the professional association fails to maintain jurisdiction over the full range of public relations activity (L’Etang, 2004). The voluntary nature of membership of the PRIA – in that anyone can call themselves a public relations practitioner – means that, in reality, there is a lack of jurisdiction or regulation of much public relations activity. It is worth noting that the PRIA is not the only professional
communication association in Australia; some practitioners are members of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), the Communications Council, and, for practitioners who specialise in community relations and stakeholder engagement, the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). I have chosen to focus on the PRIA as it is the professional association most involved in education in Australia (Turnbull, 2010), and the only one with a formal accreditation program for university public relations courses. In addition, Zawawi (2009) identifies the encouragement of tertiary education as a key component of the PRIA’s concerted efforts to establish the industry’s professional standing.

As an occupational practice, public relations is not well defined and the field struggles for legitimacy. It is frequently confused with marketing and advertising, and many people working in communication management roles do not view themselves as public relations practitioners. Some communication practitioners distance themselves from what they view as the poor reputation of public relations (Motion & Leitch, 2005), which may explain the unwillingness of practitioners to join the PRIA. Even among PRIA members, the diversity of job titles – for example, 2600 members had 845 different job titles in 2008 (PRIA, 2010a) – contributes to a lack of clarity and understanding about the precise nature of public relations work. Hutton views such diversity as “the result of misunderstanding, confusion, superficiality, a lack of business knowledge, and an exodus from the semantic baggage of the term ‘public relations’” (1999, p. 202). A survey of 321 Australian public relations practitioners confirmed the lack of representativeness in PRIA membership, noting the low visibility and poor understanding of public relations among
managers and the general public, who perceived it as “‘spin’ and not as a widely respected profession” (Wolf & de Bussy, 2008, p. 8).

Defining public relations. The ways in which the PRIA defines public relations requires further examination. The PRIA draws on various US textbook definitions to define public relations as: “the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation (or individual) and its (or their) publics” (PRIA, 2010a). This emphasis on planning and purposiveness emerges from understandings of public relations as “strategic” and seeks common ground between publics and organisations. It is arguably a refined version of what must be the most cited definition of public relations from the seminal textbook, Managing Public Relations: “the management of communication between an organization and its publics” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 6). Grunig and Hunt advocated the two-way symmetric model that promoted mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics. The influence of a more contemporary definition offered by the authors of another US textbook can also been seen: “public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006, p. 5). Such textbook definitions are arguably normative, in the sense that they offer an understanding of public relations that is idealistic in terms of its management status and in its advocacy of “symmetry” and “mutual understanding.” I develop this discussion of the significance of these particular definitions below.

A field that relies primarily on textbooks for defining its practices and knowledge base tends to reproduce normative understandings of industry practice (McKie & Munshi,
Public relations textbooks are “firmly associated with the establishment, in the sense of representing the views central to the field” (Pieczka, 2006, p. 347). A review of 14 contemporary public relations textbooks used in Australian university courses found the “books are strongly orientated to practice, with a major focus on case studies, extensive description of the various roles and fields of practice, and detailed discussion of day-to-day methods and activities”; in addition, Macnamara criticises their grounding in functionalist understandings of public relations drawn from “US-centric theories and models of practice” (2010, p. 13). The problem with these definitions is that they rely on a normative conceptualisation of what public relations should be, by presenting public relations as an ideal, two-way practice and ignoring or excluding public relations practices which do not fit this ideal (Gordon, 1997). A field, such as public relations, that is largely defined through textbooks “can distort the dissemination of knowledge” and is “more prone to perpetuating error” in that the assumptions and ideological frameworks underpinning a field tend to be uncritically reproduced (McKie & Munshi, 2007, pp. 10–11). In the case of public relations, this means public relations activity tends to be presented in terms of corporate and government communication management, ignoring other kinds of public relations activity and suppressing links with persuasion and propaganda (McKie & Munshi, 2007). I have argued elsewhere that certain types of public relations activity, particularly activity aligned with marketing and promotion or in certain sectors, such as fashion, are marginalised from mainstream understandings of public relations (Cassidy & Fitch, 2013; Fitch & Third, 2010, 2014). Similarly, Edwards (2014) argues that the need to promote a clear occupational identity, in order to justify professional recognition and social
legitimacy, results in an exclusionary occupational identity and contributes to occupational closure.

**Australian Public Relations History**

**Textbook and other histories.** The history of public relations in Australia has largely been defined through information in textbooks (see, for example, Harrison, 2011; Potts, 1976; Quarles & Rowlings, 1993; Tymson, Lazar, & Lazar, 2008; and Zawawi, 2009); in practitioner memoirs and speeches (see J. Flower, 2007; Potts, 2008; and Turnbull, 2010); or published interviews, profiles, and even obituaries of “pioneer” practitioners (see PRIA, 2010b; Morath, 2008; Nicholls, 2007; and Sheehan, 2010). As such, the practitioner perspective – noting that many Australian public relations textbooks are written by practitioners – dominates. In fact, there is a dearth of both scholarly histories and documentary evidence regarding the recent history of Australian public relations; Turner, for instance, notes “the sparse documentation of the growth of PR in the period from the 1970s through the 1990s. Even though the PRIA was in existence at the time, there is precious little public information on record” (2002, p. 223). The industry’s history in Australia is primarily a history of the PRIA and prominent PRIA members, and their attempts to claim professional recognition for public relations. In these textbook histories, public relations in Australia is generally considered to date from the arrival of General Douglas MacArthur and his public relations staff in 1943; one staff member, Asher Joel, returned to Australia after the war and set up a public relations consultancy and helped establish the professional association (Zawawi, 2009). Typically, authors describe the Second World War as “a catalyst for PR development” (Harrison, 2011, p. 65); “the catalyst to allow public relations to develop into a fully fledged profession” (Zawawi,
2009, p. 44); or describe how the Australian public relations industry “took off” in the war and the following decade (J. Flower, 2007, p. 179). Since, then, public relations is perceived to have evolved significantly and “in its current form is a modern profession” (Harrison, 2011, p. 39). Public relations history is thus a record of high profile contributors who shaped the field in the post-war years; the “history” section on the PRIA website (see http://www.pria.com.au/aboutus/history-) offers links to biographies for Fellows, the senior, prestigious, invitation-only membership category; past presidents; and “in honour” (that is, obituaries for prominent figures associated with the professional association, including, among others, Joel). Thus, historical understandings of public relations are considered primarily in terms of the activities and achievements of individual PRIA members and the establishment of the professional association.

Writing the history of a field that is arguably struggling for professional recognition and social legitimacy can be fraught. As L’Etang (2008b) warns, such histories can too easily become a justification and legitimation of the field. Textbooks written by practitioners, rather than scholars, result in a history that presents uncritically a narrative of evolution and progress (Hoy, Raaz, & Weimara, 2007). To offer one example, Australian textbook histories attribute tertiary level education and industry accreditation of university courses to confirmation of the field’s professional status. Zawawi, for instance, links the “continuing development and emphasis on public relations education at the tertiary level, with a corresponding growth in the body of knowledge of the profession,” arguing that the 1980s and 1990s’ growth in education and the industry’s accreditation program have allowed public relations to develop into a modern profession (2009, p. 35). There is, therefore, a need to examine the processes and values underpinning widely accepted
narratives, which position Australian public relations in terms of evolutionary growth towards professional standing and ethical practice. A few scholars have begun to call for Australian public relations history to be reconceptualised, arguing it is incorrect to attribute the origin of public relations to war-time public information campaigns and the post-war period and identifying a number of Australian campaigns prior to World War II (Sheehan, 2007; Macnamara & Crawford, 2010; Crawford & Macnamara, 2012). These scholars suggest these approaches are based on a narrow understanding of public relations and argue textbook authors have focused primarily on public relations consultants and ignored other public relations activity (Sheehan, 2007) or relied uncritically on “the subjective perspective of PR practitioners” (Crawford & Macnamara, 2012, p. 45). I argue that standard historical narratives of public relations in Australia have therefore led to an uncritical and unproblematic understanding of its development.

**Professional anxieties in the 1980s.** In the 1980s in Australia, the public relations industry grew significantly, as its domain expanded from primarily media relations and promotion to serving the expanding corporate sector with new functions such as investor relations, public affairs, business strategy, and lobbying (Fitch & Third, 2010). Turner, Bonner, and Marshall (2000) and Turnbull (2010) argue the mid-1980s saw a significant growth in the consultancy sector in Australia, peaking in 1986. The number of consultancies increased more than four-fold in a ten-year period, from 58 or 59 agencies in 1976 to 270 in 1986.¹ This growth is significant in terms of the professionalisation of public relations and the demarcation of the field as a distinct service or area of expertise.

¹ Turnbull (2010) cites the increase in Melbourne public relations agencies from 59 in 1976 to 270 ten years later, but offers no source. In contrast, Turner, Bonner, and Marshall (2000) cite similar figures, but state they are Australia-wide, not specifically Melbourne agencies. Their figures are 58 (not 59) agencies in 1976 and 270 in 1986; their source is the annual listing of agencies and consultancies in *B&T* magazine.
Indeed, Miller (1999) noted the significant growth of in-house public relations teams in the US and a subsequent shift in consultancy work from the 1980s onwards. Similarly, Butler (1998) and Ward (2003) point to a growing institutionalisation of public relations in the Australian government sector throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with the appointment of ministerial media advisors and the establishment of media units and public affairs teams. In tandem, the growth in communication professions in Australia increased employment opportunities, fuelling the growth in public relations education (Putnis, 1993).

Concerns over public relations’ poor image and legitimacy were prominent in Australia in the 1980s. A PRIA-commissioned report by Sydney-based Chanmac Services, drew on surveys with over 500 participants and concluded in 1985 that the Australian industry was “at a crossroads in terms of its industry base, service delivery, people distribution and image” (“PR Industry at the Crossroads,” 1985). The report acknowledged the changing industry profile, given the industry’s rapid growth and the increase in tertiary qualifications among practitioners. However, the authors also noted low salary levels in comparison with other business functions and a significant variance in salaries between male and female participants.² The rapid feminisation of public relations in this decade contributed to and amplified existing anxiety around the professional status of the field (Fitch & Third, 2010). Concerns about the field’s professional standing are illustrated in newspaper articles, trade publications, and industry newsletters. For example, public relations practitioners are described in one newspaper feature in the early 1980s as “the used car salesmen of the communications world: useful but suspect” and “the image of PR

² The report notes that 23% of male participants and 66% of female participants in the study earnt less than $30,000 per annum.
remains a kind of fast-talking hocus-pocus, a sort of witchery little understood by those outside the industry” (Dell’oso, 1983, p. 29). This article offers the standard historical narrative, attributing the origin of public relations to Ivy Lee in the US at the turn of the century and citing the origins of Australian public relations as the late 1940s. The journalist draws on interviews with David Potts (who was interviewed for the research reported in this thesis), then senior lecturer in communication at Mitchell College of Advanced Education, and Tony Benner, PRIA president, to suggest that public relations has changed from the “used car salesman” analogy. Both suggest public relations is now “respectable” and that the PRIA is “having a clear-up campaign … The PR ‘as fast-talking charlatan’ is an image we are trying to get rid of” (Benner, as cited in Dell’oso, 1983, p. 29). Indeed, as PRIA state president Bill Mackey (who later served a term as national president and was also interviewed for this research) reported in a Western Australian industry newsletter in 1984, the national council aimed to “strengthen” the institute and “to give members a greater sense of belonging to a national association” (“Major Plans to Strengthen,” 1984). These aims were to be achieved through research into the industry, the appointment of a national director and office, the establishment of a public relations research and education foundation and a Board of Fellows, and reviews of membership grades, professional accreditation, and the Code of Ethics. Mackey noted “the review of membership grading [is needed] in the light of a foreseeable large increase in admissions of graduates from PRIA-accredited courses and the general trends towards increased professionalism.”

The PRIA national council therefore introduced a number of strategies in the mid-to late 1980s with the express aim of establishing public relations’ professional standing. The new membership criteria required either a practitioner examination or an approved
university degree to be eligible for professional-grade membership. These strategies were not universally popular (“WA State Council,” 1985). The first practitioner accreditation examination was offered in 1986, and only practitioners with at least five years’ experience were eligible (“Candidates Sought,” 1986; “First PR Accreditation Exam,” 1986). In fact, the practitioner examination was not popular with senior practitioners,³ and the PRIA national council agreed late in 1989 to introduce an oral examination, later referred to as a senior professional assessment, for practitioners with at least ten years’ experience (“Oral Examination,” 1990). The PRIA founded the College of Fellows in 1987 to recognise the achievements of senior members (many of whom did not meet the newly introduced criteria for PRIA membership).⁴ Fellow membership was invitation only. These strategies, and indeed, the professional standing of public relations, are the focus of various articles in two lift-out feature sections in the influential and business-orientated *Australian Financial Review* in 1986 and 1988. The articles are written by high-profile PRIA members rather than journalists and the lift-outs are presumably funded through industry advertising. These practitioner-written articles are revealing in the way authors position public relations within a professional framework. One author distances “professional” public relations from “flim flam” and “razzamattaz,” asserting the need for “sound research” (Jabara, 1986, p. 52). Another author advises on the selection of a public relations consultancy:

> How do you distinguish the true professionals from the mediocre or worse found in every professional group? … Ask whether the principal and senior staff of the consultancy are members of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA).

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³ For evidence of the unpopularity of the written examination in WA, see “Professional Challenge” (1989), where it is noted the take-up was low, and Horne (1989) in the state council-produced newsletter.
⁴ The PRIA established the College of Fellows on October 1, 1987 (“PRIA National Convention,” 1990).
Since 1986, new membership or associateship has been available only to those who pass accreditation exams, or to graduates of recognised tertiary communication courses who have served a work experience requirement. (T. Flower, 1988, p. 64)

T. Flower refers to another professional association, the Society of Business Communicators, acknowledging their commitment to improving practical communication skills but suggesting “good public relations is much broader and involves counselling at the highest level” (1988, p. 64); it is clear the PRIA seeks to establish its domain over the latter. Emerging from this distinction is a clear bifurcation between “practical” and technical communication skills and strategy and high level “counselling” of business leaders. In one article titled “Professionalism heralds new era,” the PRIA president makes grand claims for the international standing of Australian public relations, arguing Australia “has a higher standard of people, better and more effective ideas and techniques” than the US and the UK (MacIntosh, 1986, p. 45). He points to the introduction of “accreditation by examination for those practitioners not holding recognised tertiary degrees” as an important PRIA initiative in “improving industry standards” and “the industry image” (MacIntosh, 1986, p. 45).

Perceptions of the role played by education are significant. The outgoing national president, B. Mackey, in an industry newsletter article titled “Looking back on a dramatic decade,” described “the explosion in tertiary education in public relations” as a “triumph” (1989, p. 3). Jim Pritchett, managing director of Shandwick Australia and a future president of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), noted the changing demographics of the industry with the growth in communication graduates: “consultancies are being run by people who have communication degrees … [and] who will lead the profession into the
next century” (1988, p. 62). An article by Potts tells what is now the standard and widely accepted narrative of public relations education in Australia: that it started in the early 1970s with courses at Mitchell College of Advanced Education in Bathurst, New South Wales, and at the Queensland Institute of Technology (QIT) in Brisbane, Queensland, and that such courses reflect “the growing sophistication in the public relations industry in that its practitioners are coming more out of formal courses of study in public relations and less out of journalism” (Potts, 1986, p. 50). In addition, Potts writes “the PRIA, in an effort to raise further the quality of PR performance, has also … introduced a requirement that for full membership of the institute one must now have a degree or pass an institute-set examination” (1986, p. 50). Education is perceived by the PRIA at this time to play a pivotal role in raising industry standards and in regulating membership of the institute. As such, the historical newspaper articles referred to in this section place public relations education firmly within a professional discourse.

**Dynamics, concerns, and priorities in the 1990s.** In the previous section, I refer to articles in newspapers and newsletters penned by senior PRIA members in the 1980s and establish a preoccupation with the professional status of the public relations industry. In this section, I draw on PRIA archives, including minutes of the national board, strategic plans, reports, newsletters, existing histories, and practitioner recollections to demonstrate this preoccupation is ongoing and how such concerns manifest in the 1990s. The PRIA was primarily a state-based organisation; it did not become incorporated as a national body until 1994 (see “National restructuring,” 1994; Sayer, 1994; and “Fees Increase,” 1995). PRIA members were members of the state-based organisation rather than the national organisation. In November 1990, the PRIA president noted “the current federated system is
a hindrance to achieving the objectives of the Institute for both a professional and a financial perspective” (Ray, 1990; see also “National Journal,” 1990). There was considerable tension between some states and the national organisation, even after formal incorporation of the national body, particularly as New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria (VIC) had the largest membership and the national office was run out of NSW. For example, many states refused to pay a requested A$10 levy per member to support a national newsletter, and NSW and VIC combined to produce a newsletter for their members following the collapse of the national newsletter (Anderson, 1990).

The Australian public relations industry underwent a significant restructure in the 1990s (Turnbull, 2010). Although the consultancy sector peaked in terms of revenue and size in the late 1980s, the 1987 recession had a considerable impact on the industry (Turnbull, 2010). International public relations agencies and advertising agencies began buying public relations consultancies, resulting in the establishment of more niche and smaller consultancies (Turnbull, 2010). At the same time, communication management was increasingly important to local, state, and federal government, and the federal government established the Office of Government Information and Advertising in 1989 to coordinate communication management across departments (Turnbull, 2010; Young, 2007). In 1988, the IPRA World Congress was held in Melbourne and Watson and Macnamara (in press) argue the congress represented a significant development for the Australian public relations industry in that Australian membership and leadership roles peaked in IPRA in the early 1990s. In addition, Harrison (2011) notes the advent of the internet led to “an explosion of communication opportunities” in Australia in the 1990s. In part, this expansion fuelled the
growth in communication students and courses in the tertiary sector, which I discuss in the following chapter.

In 1996, the PRIA (NSW) council surveyed its membership by sector and found the majority of its members worked in the consultancy sector (41.2%) and the corporate sector (32.6%); only a small percentage worked in government (6.2%) and the not-for-profit sectors (4.8%) (“Corporates on the Way Up,” 1996). In response to these statistics, the state council developed a campaign to recruit more practitioners from the corporate sector, concerned that they were underrepresented in their membership profile despite already comprising the second largest membership group. Given the growth in public relations roles within government identified earlier in this chapter, it is perhaps surprising that the government sector was not the focus of this campaign; however, L’Etang (2004) noted in the UK that government public relations activity had never been subject to the same professionalisation agenda.

Many PRIA activities in this decade were focused on jurisdictional issues, and the regulation of public relations activity. For example, the PRIA national board and state committees were concerned with possible encroachment from rival fields such as journalism and marketing.\(^5\) There are concerns expressed in board minutes and newsletter articles about the Australian Journalists Association [AJA] (and its subsequent incarnation, the MEAA) seeking to represent public relations practitioners and to ensure practitioners’ wages and working conditions are covered by an award, and even to accredit university public relations courses (“AJA Log of Claims,” 1992; “AJA Interference,” 1993). Another organisation, the Australian Institute of Professional Communicators planned to accredit

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\(^5\) There is, for instance, evidence of concern over perceived attacks on public relations by the editor of the *West Australian* newspaper and *Scoop*, the AJA’s magazine, in the PRIA (WA) newsletter (Allert, 1990).
courses and award scholarships (Starck, 1999, p. 156). In 1994, Anderson represented the PRIA at the newly formed Council of Australian Marketing Service Associations (CAMSA), of which the PRIA was a founding member. The PRIA national council endorsed a preferred definition of CAMSA member organisations as “marketing and communication-related organisations” rather than “marketing-communication related organisations”; that is, the board was adamant that public relations was not a sub-set of marketing but a distinct field of expertise. Turnbull (2010) maintains the Australian Centre for Corporate Public Affairs, founded in 1990, was an influential network for senior public relations practitioners working in big business and the corporate sphere. The PRIA attempted to define and indeed promote its understanding of professional public relations to show how it differed, for instance, from the concerns of the Society of Business Communicators and the Australian Centre for Corporate Public Affairs, and to distinguish its members as professionals able to offer high-level business strategy and counselling (Turnbull, 2010). Interestingly, Turnbull, a Fellow of the PRIA, states that the PRIA “has become less and less relevant to the industry,” primarily because of its “early founder obsession with declaring public relations a ‘profession’”; its failure to attract a representative membership; and its subsequent “status anxiety” (Turnbull, 2010, p. 28). As such, the PRIA sought to suppress associations with what it perceived as technical activity such as publicity and promotion.

This distinction between technical and strategic or professional public relations activity is significant, particularly as women increasingly entered public relations in these years from backgrounds in publicity and promotional roles (Fitch & Third, 2014). As I

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have argued elsewhere, the growing feminisation of public relations in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s, mapped onto and amplified existing concerns regarding the professional standing of public relations (Fitch & Third, 2010, 2014). The stratification between professional and technical tasks is common in feminising occupations. Given the rapid growth in public relations consultancies in the 1980s, and the increase in the number of university graduates entering the field in the 1980s and 1990s, there was a strong sense that the industry was in transition as more and more women entered the industry. Even in the late 1990s, national surveys revealed concern about the increasing feminisation of public relations, in terms of its potential impact on the field’s professional status, with articles such as “Breaking the glass ceiling” (Mina, 1996); “The feminisation of PR” (Fisk, 1998a); and “Will women be allowed to run PR?” (Fisk, 1998b) appearing in PRIA newsletters.

Public Relations Theory

The dominant paradigm. In my examination of PRIA’s definitions of public relations earlier in this chapter, I argued the PRIA draws heavily on US textbook definitions that underpin the dominant paradigm for public relations. The idea of a dominant paradigm for public relations was coined by Pieczka in 1994 (L’Etang, 2008a, 2009), who used it to describe primarily US public relations scholarship, which drew on management, organisational, and systems theories. It embraces functionalist and managerialist understandings of public relations, aiming for both organisational effectiveness and symmetrical/ethical practices to establish professional status and social legitimacy. In Managing Public Relations, Grunig and Hunt described public relations as “a young profession, which in the 1980s has only begun to approach true professional status” (1984, p. 4). Acknowledging that “the profession has its roots in press agentry and
propaganda, activities that society generally holds in low esteem,” they nonetheless argued that public relations had “made great strides in its sophistication, ethics, responsibility, and contribution to society” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 4). The authors presented public relations in terms of four models: press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetry, and two-way symmetry. Whereas the first two models represent one-way communication and are close to propaganda, the two-way symmetrical model is presented as the ideal form of public relations. According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), the first two models are technical whereas the two-way asymmetrical and symmetrical dialogic models are professional or strategic; these models describe the historical development of public relations. They represent some of the early theorisation of public relations, and have fundamentally shaped understandings of public relations in industry, in education, and in scholarship; the models are described as “responsible for the development of the major theoretical framework for the field” (L’Etang, 2008a, p. 251). Similarly, McKie and Munshi identify Grunig and Hunt’s book as “the seminal text of contemporary public relations” (2007, p. 12), acknowledging the “Grunigian paradigm … has been an overriding voice in PR research” (2007, p. 2). As such, these models have become the dominant paradigm for public relations, framing mainstream understandings and concepts and the structure of public relations knowledge. Byrne (2007) revealed the profound influence of the dominant paradigm in her research with Australian practitioners. Byrne found “respondent definitions are normative and do not describe public relations as per their personal experiences and beliefs” and concluded the industry’s preoccupation with professional status resulted in “this normative, two-way symmetrical stance” (2007, p. 32).
In recent years, however, scholars have begun to draw on a range of disciplines and diverse theoretical perspectives on public relations have emerged. Many of these scholars are critical of the dominant paradigm’s symmetrical approach to defining public relations as an ethical, effective management practice. An early criticism, for example, is symmetrical communication is framed as moral, virtuous, and highly ethical, even though it rarely occurs in practice (Moloney, 1997). Motion and Weaver (2005) argue that normative and functional approaches privilege organisational interests, fail to address inequalities in power, and ignore the social and political contexts of public relations practice. Significantly, the promotion of professional public relations as objective, value-free, and universal ignores the specific social context in which such ideas emerged (L’Etang, 2008a). The symmetrical model does not account for power (L’Etang, 2009). Roper (2005) views symmetrical communication as a hegemonic practice used by powerful organisations to avoid criticism and maintain unequal power relations with their stakeholders.

McKie and Munshi (2007) reject understandings of public relations as a management function, arguing that this approach positions the field only as a government or corporate function and ignores the full realm of public relations activities such as those conducted through activism and the NGO sector. The focus on managerial, organisational, and functionalist perspectives in the dominant paradigm inevitably meant that many public relations scholars working within this dominant paradigm fail to consider societal perspectives, that is, the broader role of public relations in society (Edwards & Hodges, 2011; Ihlen & Verhoeven, 2009); indeed, consequences of the dominant paradigm are the
“failure to account adequately for the role of power” and the “limited and somewhat prescriptive research agenda” of much public relations research (L’Etang, 2009, p. 14).

**Multiparadigmatic perspectives and critical approaches.** Normative and functional approaches to public relations are increasingly challenged by mostly non-US scholars, as some of the examples in the previous section demonstrate, in what Edwards and Hodges (2011) describe as a socio-cultural turn in public relations scholarship. Edwards and Hodges (2011), while acknowledging in their edited book, *Public relations, society & culture: Theoretical and empirical explorations*, the significant growth in socio-cultural public relations research, call for more radical research to understand the influence of public relations on society and of society on public relations (see also Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009). They argue that a “radical” approach reframes mainstream understandings of public relations and allows different kinds of research, such as investigating how professional narratives privilege different kinds of knowledge, how public relations engages with different and dynamic socio-cultural contexts, and why the profession takes a particular form (Edwards & Hodges, 2011, pp. 6–8).

Similarly, L’Etang (2009) describes the growth in interdisciplinary approaches to public relations, identifying the mid-1990s as the period in which critical or radical public relations research began to emerge, and a special issue of the *Australian Journal of Communication*, “Public relations on the edge” (Leitch & Walker, 1997) as significant. Indeed, Petelin maintains this issue remains “the most influential collection [of multiple perspectives and critiques of public relations] from this part of the world” and led to “a trend of greater global openness” in public relations scholarship (2005, p. 460). Writing about “Radical PR,” a gathering of international public relations academics at the
University of Stirling a decade later in 2008, who collectively were frustrated with “the dominant research agenda” and “approached the subject of public relations from multi- and inter-disciplinary contexts, going beyond functional applied work to consider wider issues of the occupation and its social impacts,” L’Etang (2009, p. 13) suggests a growing number of scholars sought alternative research directions. I was a participant in this forum.


Public Relations History

**Public relations historiography.** Public relations history tends to be presented somewhat uncritically as a linear, progressive narrative of development, or, in the words of Lamme and Miller: as “a progressive evolution from unsophisticated and unethical early roots to planned, strategic, and ethical campaigns of the current day” (2010, p. 281).
Lamme and Miller (2010) and L’Etang (2008b, 2014) attribute this steady development towards professional standing to the practice of colligation or periodisation, that is, its organisation or patterning into particular time periods to describe pivotal developmental phases. L’Etang (2014) maintains colligation has significantly framed public relations theory in particular ways and ensured the dominance of US versions of the emergence and historical development of public relations. Although Pearson states “there is no single, privileged interpretation of public relations’ past” (2009, p. 94), in his comparison of five public relations histories, Pearson identifies the broad management paradigm that offers a structural-functional explanation for public relations as the most common. Pearson found most public relations historians adopt the “dominant management paradigm” in order to legitimate “organizational needs”; however, Pearson argues, this functionalist emphasis stems from public relations’ role in serving “the needs of profit-making organizations in a post-industrial capitalist economy” (2009, p. 108). Public relations histories are written from certain ideological positions, which influence the interpretation and construction of those histories (Pearson, 2009). Indeed, US public relations histories tend to be dominated by business and politics, resulting in an almost exclusive focus on corporate public relations (L’Etang, 2004, 2008b; Miller, 2000; C. Myers, 2014).

The Australian history of public relations is dominated by practitioner accounts (Crawford & Macnamara, 2012). There are significant implications for histories that rely on practitioner perspectives. As L’Etang notes, prominent practitioners are “likely to be masters and mistresses of impression management and also keen to leave their mark on the historical records” and “retrospectives by retired practitioners are … full of platitudes and idealism” (2008b, pp. 324, 333). It is widely recognised among political scholars that
“elites” highlight, and possibly exaggerate the significance of, their role in, historical events in interviews (Berry, 2002; Kezar, 2003; Mikecz, 2012; Tansey, 2007). McKie and Munshi, for example, point to Edward “Bernay’s (1965) self-promotion, evident in his account of how Creel’s US Committee on public information almost won the First World War single-handedly with Bernays playing an inspired role” (2007, p. 123). Indeed, one researcher who interviewed Bernays later wrote the “entire visit had been orchestrated by a virtuoso” (Ewen, 1996, p. 17). This dominance of practitioner perspectives contributes to a lack of consideration of the broader social context for the development of public relations, by focusing instead on individual achievement (L’Etang, 2008b), and points to the need for a more critical approach to understanding public relations history.

The recent interest in public relations historiography, fuelled by the inaugural International History of Public Relations Conference (IHPRC) in Bournemouth in 2010 (see http://microsites.bournemouth.ac.uk/historyofpr/) and more critical histories (see, for example, L’Etang, 2004, and Lamme & Miller, 2010) has resulted in growing awareness of the significance of progressivist and evolutionary accounts. In particular, L’Etang (2004, 2008b, 2014) has demonstrated the need to investigate history in specific contexts and to question the impact of particular research methodologies. Similarly, a recent publication identified the need for public relations historians to offer multiple levels of analysis and more diverse perspectives, and to contextualise historical evidence (St John III, Lamme & L’Etang, 2014). While scholars call for a reconceptualisation of these widely-accepted historical narratives (L’Etang, 2008b; Lamme & Miller, 2010; Macnamara & Crawford, 2010; McKie & Xifra, 2012), a more critical and reflexive approach to public relations history is required for this to occur. Watson, IHPRC founder, categorised 150 recent
journal articles and conference papers on public relations history as descriptive, analytical, or critical. Watson concluded “PR historians [are] telling stories and analysing them but the field’s critical faculties are not being tested enough, with [only] 17 per cent of papers being categorised as critical” (2013, p. 6). He defines critical as “more questioning and challenging … as it questions the essence of power and control and puts forward new or alternative views of historical research,” in contrast to descriptive approaches that seek to reconstruct the past and analytical approaches that explore historical causes and impacts (Watson, 2013, p. 6). In addition, Watson called for public relations historians to “be more dangerous,” and to “avoid Grunigian analysis as an historiographic tool” (2013, p. 19). In the following section, then, I develop this idea of a critical history.

**Critical history.** Critical histories should problematise the way history is used, in that they interrogate taken-for-granted accounts and official histories (Dean, 1994; L’Etang, 1995). Such histories, to draw on Foucault, offer “a history of the present” (1979, p. 31). This approach is relevant for my thesis because I am trying to understand the factors that shaped contemporary public relations education in Australia. Rather than viewing the introduction of public relations to university-level education as evidence of the field’s professional development, I consider instead the ways in which the PRIA understood the role of, and attempted to regulate, public relations education and the significance for the ways in which public relations knowledge is constituted and institutionalised in the Australian context.

Foucault’s work offers a critique of both continuism and progressivism in that the notion of *difference* allows scientific changes to occur in ad hoc and piecemeal ways rather than a single rationale or grand narrative and without evolutionary development towards
something better (McHoul & Grace, 1993, pp. 8–10). Things could always have been otherwise. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault described “the history of ideas” as “recount[ing] the by-ways and margins of history … that everyday, transient writing that never acquires the status of an *œuvre*” (1972, p. 136) and, at the same time, “cross[ing] the boundaries of existing disciplines, to deal with them from the outside, and to reinterpret them” (1972, p. 137). Rather than conventional historiography, Foucault proposes a more critical historical method that avoids metanarratives (such as progression and universality) but instead considers new ways of approaching primary sources and allows discontinuities, difference, and multiplicity (Dean, 1994: McHoul & Grace, 1993). Foucault identified the importance of problematisation in history in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, arguing the historian does not interpret a primary source and that “the document is not the fortunate tool of a history that is primarily and fundamentally memory” (1972, p. 7). That is, archival processes “constitute forms of knowledge in and of themselves” (King, 2012, p. 17). As Foucault wrote:

> history has altered its position in relation to the document: it has taken as its primary task, not the interpretation of the document, nor the attempt to decide whether it is telling the truth or what is its expressive value, but to work on it from within and to develop it: history now organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations. The document, then, is no longer for history an inert material through which it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said, the events of which only the trace remains; history is now trying to define within the
documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations. (Foucault, 1972, pp. 6–7)

Foucault therefore argues that archaeology “does not treat discourse as a document, as a sign of something else, an element that ought to be transparent … it is concerned with discourse in its own volume, as a monument” (Foucault, 1972, pp. 138–139). By examining historical evidence in this thesis, I construct a critical history of the development of public relations in Australia, focusing on public relations education. I return to this discussion of the significance of critical history in my discussion of the design of the research reported in this thesis in Chapter 3.

**Professionalisation, Institutionalisation, and Education**

**Understanding professionalisation.** In the public relations literature, professionalism is often understood in ways which “reflects the view largely abandoned by the theorists of the professions since the 1970s” (Pieczka & L’Etang, 2006, p. 270). For example, de Bussy and Wolf (2009) acknowledge that public relations scholars generally identify the development of a public relations body of knowledge; the regulation of ethical standards by an industry body; and credentials or accreditation for practitioners as evidence public relations is now a profession. A major paradigm shift occurred in writing about the professions in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Freidson, 1983, 1986; Macdonald, 1995; Pieczka & L’Etang, 2006; Torstendahl, 1990). Until that point, professions were understood as a moral force and a stabilising influence on society, or were described primarily in terms of their socially functional traits such as altruism or through the characteristics which distinguished them from occupations (Davis, 2005; Macdonald, 1995). However, sociologists began to focus on “the unusually effective, monopolistic
institutions of professions and their high status as the critical factor and treated knowledge, skill, and ethical orientations not as objective characteristics but rather as ideology” (Freidson 1986, p. 29) and on “how they [professionals] constituted their social worlds as participants and how they constructed their careers” (Macdonald, 1995, p. 4). For example, Everett C. Hughes reframed the investigation of the professions in 1963, but the significance was not recognised until much later:

in my own studies, I passed from the false question “Is this occupation a profession” to the more fundamental one “what are the circumstances in which people in an occupation attempt to turn it into a profession and themselves into professional people?” (Hughes, 1963, as cited in Macdonald, 1995, p. 6)

This thesis investigates professionalisation, that is, “the process by which producers of special services sought to constitute and control a market for their expertise” and recognises that “socially recognised expertise” is “founded on a system of education and credentialing” (Larson, 1977, pp. xvi, xvii). Viewing the profession as a historical construct, rather than a static entity whose characteristics could be catalogued and described, allowed sociologists to focus on the development of an occupation to a profession (Pieczka & L’Etang, 2006).

Contemporary research into the sociology of professions usually focuses on issues of occupational closure, social stratification, social exclusion, state formation, and the development of a capitalist economic order (Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011). In addition, Muzio and Kirkpatrick call for a greater focus on organisations, noting professional activity takes place largely in organisational settings and in academic institutions. Professional projects are institutionalisation projects that advance by claiming intellectual and economic
space in competition with other professions (Abbott, 1988; Suddaby & Viale, 2011). However, liberal organisational professions, of which public relations is one example, struggle “to realize the degree of indetermination, monopolization, and control of their knowledge base … their professional project is closely related to attempts to harness, colonize and monopolize organisational spaces, processes, and policies” (Reed, 1996, pp. 584, 585). In the following section, I therefore consider the role of education in professionalisation.

Given professionalisation occurs in a dynamic, competitive environment where emerging professions jostle for space (Abbott, 1988), another way of thinking about professionalisation is “the collective demarcation and institutionalization of occupational practices” (Noordegraaf, 2011, p. 467). Professional associations play a pivotal role in organising, creating, and defining professional behaviour and practices, and in doing so, asserting occupational closure: “they bring together professional workers, define professional work, establish boundaries and demarcate fields, standardize work methods and form professional loyalties” (Noordegraaf, 2011, p. 468). Professions are processes of occupational closure that marshall exclusionary and demarcatory strategies to control access to and regulate professional practice (Davies, 1996; Witz, 1992). This brief review of ideas about the profession reveals the social specificity of the idea of the profession and confirms it is a construct of a particular social and historical context.7

Noordegraaf identifies three mechanisms used by professional associations seeking professional status:

7 As one example, the masculinity of the professions has played out in the demarcation of “the professional” from “the technical,” resulting in a gendered “occupational division of labour,” common in feminised occupations (Witz, 1992, p. 47). See Fitch and Third (2010) for a fuller discussion of these ideas and how these processes play out in the Australian public relations industry today.
- **Cognitive mechanisms**: schooling, education, training, knowledge, skills, conferences, books, journals and magazines;

- **Normative mechanisms**: membership criteria; selection criteria; entry barriers; certificates; codes of conducts; sanctions and discipline;

- **Symbolic mechanisms**: rites of passage, stories, heroes, codes of ethics, service ideals and missions. (2011, p. 470)

These mechanisms jointly “define work practices, demarcate occupational fields, regulate behaviours, symbolize professionalism and provide external cues” (Noordegraaf, 2011, p. 470). It is not difficult to relate these mechanisms to the PRIA’s attempts, and renewed attempts from 1985 onwards, to develop greater professional standing. For example, cognitive mechanisms include the PRIA-sponsored, edited book, *Public relations practice in Australia* (Potts, 1976); the production of various state and national newsletters, including *Profile* [c. 1983–2002], *Public Relations* [c. 1990–2001], and *The PProfessional* [ca. 1996]; the establishment of national conferences; and the introduction of accreditation criteria for university courses in 1991. Normative mechanisms include the introduction of new membership criteria and entry barriers in 1986, including the need for professional-grade members to hold an accredited degree or pass a written examination. Symbolic mechanisms include the introduction of new ethics codes for the PRIA and the creation in 1987 of the prestigious College of Fellows, in that the Fellows, as a special, invitation-only membership category represent senior expertise and professional knowledge, and are responsible for the ethical regulation of the industry. In addition, practitioner perspectives offer both “rites of passage” and even heroes; Asher Joel, for instance, is described as “the Australian public relations pioneer” (Sheehan, 2007, p. 5) and Morath’s (2008) book of
interviews with senior PRIA members is subtitled: “conversations with Australia’s public relations legends.” Noordegraaf (2011) notes the successful institutionalisation of these mechanisms strengthens claims for professional status by helping to ensure occupational closure.

**Professionalisation and education.** In this thesis, I focus on university-level education as a mechanism of professionalisation. Education plays a key role in processes of professionalisation (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2009; Noordegraaf, 2011). From a critical perspective, education “as embodied in formal credentials is seen as acting as a powerful exclusionary mechanism within professional projects” (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2009, p. 1340) and, thereby, justifying a field’s monopoly on a set of occupational practices. Universities are key actors in professionalisation and, from the industry perspective, the regulation of education and training is important in ensuring quality and competency in future practitioners (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2009). However, there is little information on the dynamic between universities and practitioners in specific terms of how this professionalisation occurs (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2009). In addition, the significance of particular socio-historical contexts and the development of a national profession deserves further research (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2009; McKie & Xifra, 2012).

Education plays a particular role in legitimising a field, defining its body of knowledge, and offering qualifications that can be used for occupational closure (L’Etang, 2008a). Therefore, investigating industry attempts to regulate university education can offer important insights into how the PRIA both constitutes public relations knowledge and understands education as an important mechanism of professionalisation (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2009; Noordegraaf, 2011). It also addresses calls to investigate how professional
bodies, such as public relations associations, foster professionalism (de Bussy & Wolf, 2009; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2011). Although Noordegraaf (2011) identifies the successful institutionalisation of professionalising mechanisms strengthens claims for professional status, by helping ensure occupational closure, the institutionalisation of public relations in the academy is not straightforward. Public relations has suffered weak institutionalisation in the Australian academy due in part to its close industry links, its vocational orientation, and threats of encroachment from other fields such as marketing, advertising, and even journalism, despite the industry’s attempts to establish its unique disciplinary status (Fitch, 2013a; McKie & Hunt, 1999; Hatherell & Bartlett, 2006).

Researching how the public relations industry sought to claim professional status, through the application of specialised knowledge for social and economic gain (Larson, 1977) and, in turn, the constitution and institutionalisation of that knowledge, are significant areas for research. Such research allows an understanding of professions, which addresses the issue of power, and how that power is manifest through particular institutional structures and processes. I explore this theme in more detail in the following chapter.

Professions are founded not simply on a body of abstract knowledge, but also on the “everyday, professional knowledge” or “working knowledge” of practitioners (Pieczka, 2006, p. 292). This distinction is significant for public relations, where many practitioners perceive a schism between theory and practice and tend to value practical expertise over abstract knowledge (Byrne, 2008), with implications for the industry regulation of public relations education. Scholars, professional associations, and practitioners differ in their understandings of professionalism (Breit & Demetrious, 2010; van Ruler, 2005). For example, understandings of professional and ethical practice in the industry are orientated
towards the client, profit, and competitive advantage; however in Australian public relations education, where public relations is generally perceived as a communication (rather than a business) discipline, there is more focus on the broader social role of public relations (Breit & Demetrious, 2010; Fitch, 2013b). In a number of studies, critical scholars explore the role of knowledge in the constitution of public relations as a profession, that is, the ways in which “a body of practical knowledge” rather than abstract knowledge is constructed and indeed valued in the industry (Pieczka, 2006, p. 281). These studies include participant observation of senior British practitioners on a training course and analysis of campaign entries for the annual Institute of Public Relations (IPR) awards in the UK (Pieczka, 2000, 2002, 2006, 2007); a history of British public relations (L’Etang, 2004); and analysis of the professional narratives of three public relations associations, including the PRIA (Breit & Demetrious, 2010). They argue public relations has a weak ethical culture and a thin body of knowledge and expertise (Breit & Demetrious, 2010), and that public relations expertise is constructed by practitioners as “constituted and transmitted through practice” (Pieczka, 2002, p. 321). More research into the constitution and institutionalisation of public relations knowledge is needed.

Disciplinary discourses and public relations knowledge. Disciplines are significant for professions as they are an important component of regulating and controlling a set of industry practices or occupations. In discursive terms, “disciplines constitute a system of control in the production of discourse, fixing its limits” (Foucault, 1972, p. 224). In her investigation of discourse and credentialism in relation to the public relations industry in the UK, Edwards (2014) found that disciplinary discourses construct practice and occupational identity in particular ways and thereby contribute to exclusionary
processes of occupational closure. This exclusion operates through both formal and informal credentialism, which Edwards defines as “the construction of barriers to entry through different forms of certification” as well as “aspects of identity … as part of the construction of ‘professionalism’ that underpins claims to legitimacy” (2014, p. 3).

Discourses of professionalism dominate public relations in that the social legitimacy the industry craves is often negated by the emphasis on organisational self-interest (Edwards, 2014; Pieczka & L’Etang, 2006). Professional associations play a particular role in defining professionalism through the production of an “informal credential system that characterises the field, articulating normative occupational identities and purposes” and of “formal texts that communicate disciplinary discourses” (Edwards, 2014, p. 4).

The expansion of the Australian higher education sector in the 1970s and 1980s saw a rapid rise in the number of disciplines. Drawing on Foucault (1972), I use “disciplines” to refer to the ways in which knowledge is organised and in this thesis seek to investigate the relationship between the development of the public relations discipline and the social, political, and historical contexts in which that development occurred. Disciplines are dynamic rather than static, socially constructed, ideally concerned with the development of new knowledge, and subject to external societal pressures (Trowler, 2012). Disciplines promote a particular world view and define disciplinary boundaries (Klein, 1990) and “the ways in which academics engage with their subject matter, and the narratives they develop … are important structural factors in the formulation of disciplinary cultures” (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p. 23). In the following chapter, I therefore explore the institutionalisation of public relations in higher education.
Conclusion

In this chapter I presented a recent history of public relations in an Australian context. In doing this, I argued that professional narratives and textbook histories present an uncritical understanding of public relations and tend to frame these histories in terms of an evolutionary development towards professional status. I therefore identified the need for a more critical approach to public relations history. Drawing on the sociology of the professions, I also identified a significant gap in the literature in terms of how public relations professional associations foster professionalism.

This chapter introduced the public relations industry’s preoccupation with its professional status. Many of the ideas in contemporary public relations literature are derived from old-fashioned approaches to understanding professions (Pieczka & L’Etang, 2006). Normative and functionalist understandings that focus on organisational perspectives have a significant influence on professional narratives and public relations scholarship. These narratives frame public relations within a professional discourse, defining it as an ethical and strategic practice, demonstrating its social responsibility, and confirming its status as a management discipline. The dominant paradigm, drawn from US scholarship and industry practices, continues to structure conceptual understandings through mainstream theories and through attitudes expressed by practitioners. That such understandings of public relations were developed in a particular social and political context needs to be recognised. Public relations is not a universal practice. More recent scholarship calls for recognition of the social construction of public relations and the importance of taking social and historical contexts into account (see, for example, Bardhan
In this chapter, I established a number of perspectives, which offer important insights into the professionalisation of public relations. The first insight reveals the influence of the dominant paradigm in shaping understandings of, and research into, public relations in Australia. Mainstream approaches position public relations in normative and functionalist terms, focusing on its role serving organisational goals. The emergence of interdisciplinary and critical research in the last decade offers alternative perspectives, and allows public relations activity to be considered in relation to its broader societal role. The second insight confirms the PRIA’s preoccupation with its professional standing, revealed in industry narratives, that results in the need to establish its jurisdiction over, and to regulate, public relations activity. In particular, concerns about a distinct body of knowledge or professional expertise and the emphasis on ethical behaviour and social responsibility are manifestations of the need to establish public relations as a profession. The third insight suggests that historical narratives of public relations tend to conform to the dominant paradigm, in that the history of public relations is generally presented in terms of an evolutionary progression towards a modern profession. The fourth insight draws on PRIA archives to demonstrate that anxiety around the professional standing of public relations is a recurrent theme, and that the unprecedented growth in the public relations industry in the 1980s and 1990s led to the professional association identifying and establishing a number of strategies to address concerns about the industry’s poor reputation. These strategies included establishing the College of Fellows, introducing stricter membership criteria, and standardising the accreditation of university courses. The
constitution of public relations knowledge, as a distinct field of expertise, was a significant factor in establishing the field’s professional credentials. The following chapter therefore explores the development of public relations university education in Australia.
Chapter 2: Public Relations Education in Australia

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I established that gaps exist in the public relations literature regarding the ways professional associations seek to establish professional standing and identified the need for histories that avoid constructing public relations in terms of an evolutionary progression. The regulation of public relations education is an important component in the PRIA’s professional drive. In this chapter, therefore, I investigate public relations “as an academic or educational project” (McKie & Munshi, 2007, p. 12), focusing on its introduction and development as a course of study in the higher education sector in Australia. The history of public relations education in the US (see, for example, Ehling, 1992, and Wright, 2011) and, to a lesser extent, in the UK and Europe (L’Etang & Pieczka, 2006) is well documented. There is little scholarship on public relations education in Asia (Sriramesh, 2004).

The aim of this chapter is to understand how the broader societal context contributed to the development of public relations education in Australian universities. I consider the factors, which influenced public relations education and the constitution of knowledge underpinning the public relations curriculum, and reveal tensions and ambiguities around constructions of public relations knowledge and challenges to public relations in the academy. I argue the emergence of public relations in Australian higher education can only be understood in relation to broader societal changes including the massification and increasing vocationalisation of Australian higher education and the expanding public relations industry in the 1980s.
This chapter examines the development of public relations as a course of study in the Australian higher education sector and the social and political contexts in which this development occurred. I tease out the ways in which the public relations body of knowledge is constituted in higher education and subject to diverse and competing paradigms and practices. This chapter consists of four sections. The first section considers the significance of education for professionalisation and develops the discussion introduced in the previous chapter. Divergent understandings of professional knowledge are considered. The second section reviews significant changes in the Australian higher education sector from the 1970s, arguing that the massification of higher education resulted in both the marketisation of education and significant stratification among education institutions. These changes allowed the emergence of new, vocationally-oriented fields of study. In particular, the growth of communication studies offered opportunities for public relations. The third section discusses public relations education in Australia, focusing on its introduction to the tertiary education sector. Initially, only short certificate and associate diploma courses were available, but diploma and degree courses were offered in the 1970s, with significant growth in public relations degree courses in the following decade. In the final section, I return to the involvement of professional associations in public relations education. I consider the role of textbooks in the Australian public relations curriculum. I also introduce international and Australian industry-funded reports, which attempt to define the public relations curriculum, and identify PRIA strategies aimed at standardising the regulation of Australian public relations education in the 1990s. These sections offer an historical overview of the development of public relations education in the Australian tertiary sector.
Education and Professionalism

**Professions, knowledge, and education.** Universities are integral to the professions, and it is important for professionalising occupations to develop a body of knowledge and be accepted as a university discipline. According to Foucault, education allows access to a discourse, but “every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it” (1972, p. 227). Furthermore, as I discussed in the previous chapter, academic disciplines play a significant role in controlling discourse production (Foucault, 1972). The institutionalisation of public relations education is therefore significant in terms of the constitution of public relations knowledge and the delineation of the disciplinary boundaries of public relations. The relationship between industry and the academy, and between practice and research, in relation to public relations knowledge and the development of a “suitable” public relations curriculum, begs further consideration.

Education provides both the “cognitive core and knowledge base which underpins the specialist expertise sold in the market place” and “credibility, and qualifications may be used for gatekeeping purposes to achieve social closure and limit who can and cannot practice” (L’Etang, 2008a, p. 40). In the previous chapter, I drew on the work of Pieczka (2000, 2002), L’Etang (2004), and Breit and Demetrious (2010) to suggest that the public relations body of knowledge is thin, and draws on industry understandings of public relations expertise or knowledge as “constituted and transmitted through practice” (Pieczka, 2002, p. 321). Writing about the significance of Foucault’s work for public relations research, Motion and Leitch acknowledge that successful discourse strategies may result in “hegemonic … status” and become “so pervasive that [they are] perceived as
As such, professional narratives conform to normative conceptualisations of public relations activity. This observation has implications for the development of the public relations curriculum.

Education in vocationally-oriented fields is largely informed by industry expectations and practitioner understandings. However, scholars, educators, professional associations, and practitioners often have different understandings of what constitutes professional behaviour or knowledge (Fitch, 2011; van Ruler, 2005). For example, studies report divergent understandings of professionalism in different sectors: van Ruler (2005) and Breit and Demetrious (2010) in public relations; Corbin and Carter (2007) in law; and Raybould and Wilkins (2006) and Kelley-Patterson and George (2001) in hospitality. Van Ruler identifies the significance of personality, rather than scholarly or “expert knowledge” for public relations practitioner understandings of professionalism (2005, p. 163). Practitioners value years of industry experience, rather than university education, and view professionalism as “gain[ing] value for their clients by their commitment and their personality, their creativity and their enthusiasm for a cluster of tasks negotiated with their client” (van Ruler, 2005, p. 161). As I identified in the previous chapter, Breit and Demetrious (2010) conclude from their analysis of narratives produced by professional associations, public relations industry understandings of ethical and professional practice are orientated towards the client, profit, and competitive advantage.

The relationship between industry and the academy therefore deserves further attention, in order to understand how the public relations body of knowledge is constituted. Biggs (1999) suggests that the knowledge bases for education and scholarship differ as educators rely on didactic knowledge, promoting normative understandings. Schön argues
the “institutionalized relations of research and practice, and … the normative curriculum of professional education” are the result of a Western “Technical Rationality” model, which separates research and practice and promotes the introduction of a body of knowledge to students before its application to “real-world problems of practice” (1983, pp. 26, 27).

Whereas Schön (1983) suggests that the hierarchical separation of knowledge constructed academics and scholars as superior to industry practitioners, I argue in public relations, and in other vocationally-oriented fields, this hierarchy is often reversed, in that industry experience is traditionally perceived by professional associations and many practitioners as more valuable than scholarly work. As early as 1976, the PRIA (NSW) state president imagines the future for public relations and suggests in 1992 tertiary qualifications will be standard (H. Myers, 1976). However, he expressed concern about an “overacademic approach,” imagining that in the future “economic, psychological jargon and so on [are] getting in the way of effective communication” (H. Myers, 1976, p. 329). The hierarchy suggested here is that public relations knowledge is generated by practitioners and remains superior to academic understandings of public relations.

This theme of the superiority of knowledge-constituted-in-practice continues to resonate in contemporary discussions of public relations education. For instance, Potts, who was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2012 for his service to the public relations profession, most notably to public relations education (PRIA, 2012b), tells a consistent story of the history of Australian public relations education and his significant role in its development (see Morath, 2008; Potts, 1976, 2008; and Starck, 1999). Potts describes how in the early 1970s, he “wrote the first three-year course from instinct, from what I would expect anyone working for me to be able to do” (Potts, 2008, p. 2). In this
way, “knowledge” in a particular field is clearly defined by industry expectations, in terms of the recruitment of future employees, and practitioner understandings and expectations of the work they perform. Potts, alert to the “real danger, therefore, of having PR taught by academic staff who have little or no real workplace public relations experience,” questions whether the public relations discipline needs fulltime academics, and suggests academic staff should be required to “take shortterm assignments to practice in the field to keep themselves relevant” (2008, p. 7). Further, Potts argues:

Academe can sometimes appear remote from the day-to-day practice needs.

Academics were at some time regarded with some suspicion by some practitioners for being too theoretical, too impractical. … academics should not be afraid of rolling up their sleeves and getting into the working environment. (Potts, 2008, p. 6)

Not only is industry practice considered the dominant referent for the public relations body of knowledge to be transmitted in the university sector (Hatherell & Bartlett, 2006),¹ but industry practice is constructed as continuously improving and the site of innovation and knowledge development, whereas academic public relations is constructed as static, and in real danger of becoming “out of touch.” Potts’ speech to the PRIA College of Fellows in 2008 defines public relations knowledge in terms of public relations practice and reveals an ambivalent relationship with the university sector. On the one hand, the establishment of public relations as a course of higher education was perceived as pivotal to ensuring that public relations is recognised as a profession. On the other hand, from the industry perspective, public relations knowledge is constituted and developed in industry practice,

¹ There is a parallel to what Bromley, writing about Australian journalism education in the 1990s, refers to as the focus on “reproducing existing practice” to ensure “job-ready graduates” and the over-reliance on industry practice as the “dominant referent” (2006, p. 214). There are, however, significant differences in the relationship between journalism and public relations industries and the academy.
Higher Education in Australia

The marketisation of education. A small number of higher education institutions introduced public relations courses in the 1970s, but it was not until the second half of the 1980s that public relations developed significantly as a course of study. In a PRIA-funded report into Australian public relations education published at the end of the 1980s, the authors identify 14 higher education institutions teaching public relations; at the beginning of the 1980s, there were only three courses on offer (Quarles & Potts, 1990). In that decade, the public relations industry also grew, as its domain expanded from primarily media relations and promotion to serving the expanding corporate sector with new functions such as investor relations, public affairs, business strategy, and lobbying (Fitch & Third, 2010). In the previous chapter, I discussed the significant expansion of the consultancy sector in the 1980s (Turnbull, 2010; Turner, 2002) and the growth in specialist communication roles within government sectors (Butler, 1998; Ward, 2003). As such, the increase in public relations courses was driven by market demand and increasing employment opportunities. Public relations is not an isolated example as a similar trend occurred in business and other communication-related fields (Maras, 2004). Thus, the introduction of public relations courses needs to be understood in the context of a changing higher education sector and labour force.

In the 1970s, there was a two-tier structure of established universities and colleges of advanced education in Australian higher education, with “universities emphasizing ‘academic’ degrees and pure research, and colleges of advanced education emphasizing vocational degrees and applied research” (Putnis, 1986, p. 144). The colleges adopted a
more utilitarian and vocational focus, resulting in greater specialisation and diversity in courses of study (Maras, 2004; Raciti, 2010). Significantly, public relations was first taught in the non-university, vocationally oriented college sector and became established in the 1980s in institutes of technology and colleges of advanced education. These institutes and colleges became universities with the introduction of the Unified National System in 1987; the 11 universities and 69 colleges in Australia became 36 universities in 1994, following a number of mergers (Raciti, 2010). These “new” universities continued to focus on education rather than research, resulting in a new hierarchy of universities (Marginson & Considine, 2000; Raciti, 2010). Public relations has struggled to become established as a course of study in the elite sandstone universities (known as the Group of Eight) in the current Australian higher education sector hierarchy, suggesting it continues to lack academic legitimacy and full disciplinary status (Hatherell & Bartlett, 2006).

In 1987, a change in government policy allowed international undergraduate students to pay fees (Raciti, 2010), resulting in an expansion of social science and business courses in the late 1980s and 1990s (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2005). This change meant vocationally-oriented courses such as public relations became important revenue raisers for their universities (Fitch, 2013a). More government-led reforms in 1996 further reduced government funding to universities, and increased the reliance on the income generated by overseas students (Raciti, 2010). In addition, Marginson (2004) identifies transnational education resulted in significant stratification among Australian universities, as the commercial orientation of Australian education involved mostly lower status rather than prestigious institutions.
International education remains a significant industry in Australia, and the demand is primarily driven from Asia; Australian universities meet this demand through the provision of onshore, and increasingly offshore, education (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2005; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007). Twenty-two per cent of all tertiary students in Australia in 2009 were international students, the highest proportion in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries (ABS, 2011). The sector generated $18.6 billion for the Australian economy, and earned a further $595 million through offshore activity (Australian Education International, 2011). While it is difficult to locate precise figures for public relations as a field of study, the most popular courses for international students are social sciences and business courses such as commerce and accounting, with international students making up a significant proportion of students (Gallagher, 2011). To offer one example, the three publicly funded universities that teach public relations in the researcher’s state of Western Australia (WA) “export” their public relations courses for delivery in Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, and Mauritius, with some individual units also on offer in Vietnam and Hong Kong (Fitch, 2013a).

There is little evidence that the success in exporting education has had any significant impact on the way universities consider issues of curriculum and pedagogy, except perhaps to ensure they are generic enough for delivery in multiple countries. For example, McBurnie and Ziguras maintain that business courses offered by Australian universities in Southeast Asia are “homogenized and universalized, offering a generic Anglo-American curriculum … [with] very little effort to tailor the curriculum to respond to the particular needs of offshore students in different countries” (2007, p. 62). Marginson
and Rhoades (2002) describe the tension between nation-states, national and international markets and national professions and argue the global dimension of higher education is under-theorised. Australian public relations scholars have only recently began to consider the curricular implications of transnational education (see, for instance, Chia, 2009; Fitch, 2013a; Fitch & Desai, 2012; Fitch & Surma, 2006; and Wolf, 2010). I consider the ways in which the national professional association incorporated (or failed to incorporate) transnational and global public relations activity in their expectations of the Australian curriculum in my analysis in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

**Public Relations in the Academy**

**Public relations and academic legitimacy.** Public relations struggles for academic legitimacy and its lack of disciplinary status stems in part from its close industry links (Hatherell & Bartlett, 2006; L’Etang & Pieczka, 2006). The development of a curriculum primarily to meet industry demands has resulted in “a certain intellectual myopia” (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000, p. 7) and a narrow disciplinarity (Hatherell & Bartlett, 2006; McKie & Munshi, 2007). The challenge for public relations is that its dominant referent is industry practice rather than “intellectually coherent academic activities” (Hatherell & Bartlett, 2006, p. 4). Hatherell and Bartlett argue:

> Our point is, however, that whatever its institutional alignment, public relations has been constructed – at least in the mainstream United States model that also has proved dominant in Australia – as a business discipline, that is as a body of theory and pedagogical practice, whose primary rationale is to serve (whether by developing new practitioners, or providing research or other professional services of utility to existing practitioners) a business practice that lies outside the academy
and is historically anterior to its incorporation as a university subject. (2006, p. 2)

At the heart of this tension is a fundamental discrepancy between the imperatives of academic scholarship and industry practice; Hatherell and Bartlett ask how scholars can be objective and independent of the industry when “the underlying rationale of the discipline remains to legitimate, and serve the interests of, a particular business practice” (2006, p. 4). This tension is somewhat exacerbated by the growth in popularity of public relations programs; they are seen as “cash cows” by universities and teaching staff are expected to be technically competent and have industry experience but not necessarily conform to traditional academic notions of research and scholarship (Botan & Taylor, 2004). In addition, the strong influence of mainstream US public relations theory has both defined, and to a certain extent limited, public relations scholarship and education in Australia (Hatherell & Bartlett, 2006). Consequently, Hatherell and Bartlett call for Australian public relations scholarship to be liberated “from the dead hand of the United States academy” (2006, p. 7). They argue that the focus in Australian academic public relations on “developing and delivering undergraduate (and more recently, postgraduate coursework) programs to produce trained technicians for the public relations workforce” limits opportunities for the development of “more scholarly work” (2006, p. 10).

**Communication studies as “a curriculum idea.”**

Although Hatherell and Bartlett (2006) offer an excellent discussion of public relations’ struggle for academic legitimacy in the Australian context, they present public relations as a business discipline (perhaps because their institution, Queensland University of Technology [QUT], is one of the few Australian universities to offer public relations in a business faculty). The majority of

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² Putnis identified communication studies as a “curriculum idea” in that it offered “an organising focus” for multidisciplinary studies combining liberal arts and vocational relevance (1988, p. 32). This concept is further developed in Putnis (1993) and Maras (2006).
public relations programs in Australia are traditionally taught within communication or arts faculties. For example, in 1990, 12 of the 14 courses with a public relations component in Australia were taught in humanities, social science, or communication schools and only two courses were offered in business schools (Quarles & Potts, 1990). Public relations is still primarily offered in humanities or communication schools in Australia.

The introduction of public relations as a course of study to institutes of technologies and colleges of advanced education in the 1970s, and fuelled in the 1980s by the expansion of both the industry and the higher education sector, follows a similar trajectory to journalism, advertising, and, to a lesser extent, marketing courses (Burns, 2003; Ellis & Waller, 2011; Kerr, Waller, & Patti, 2009). Advertising, for example, was part of the curriculum expansion of “new” universities, and its growth in universities can be linked to market demand and the rapid growth of the advertising industry in the 1980s (Kerr, Waller, & Patti, 2009). However, the link between the development of public relations and communication studies in the context of significant changes in the higher education sector in Australia, as well as the growth in communication professions, is under-researched.

In comparison to public relations, the history of communication studies in Australia is well documented. This is partly due to the efforts of the academic association, Australia and New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA), its associated journals, and individual scholars (see, for example, Flew, 2010; Maras, 2003, 2004, 2006; and Putnis, 1986, 1988, 1993). Flew calls for more research into “the institutional structures and intellectual flows that shape distinctive national communication research frameworks and how historical trends … [such as] the relationship to professional fields such as journalism

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3 The Australian Communication Association (ACA) founding conference was held in 1980. It became the Australia and New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA) in 1994 (see ANZCA, n.d.; Borland, 1995; Maras, 2004).
Therefore, in this section, I consider the relationship between public relations education and the success of communication studies in Australia.

The first schools of communication in Australia emerged in the 1970s and experienced tremendous growth in the next two decades, fuelled in part by the increase in participation rates in tertiary education and the focus in new colleges on vocational education and applied research, which allowed professional study in areas such as public relations and journalism (Putnis, 1993). That is, market demand and increasing employment opportunities in these expanding industries contributed to the institutionalisation of communication studies, which “gain[ed] industry credibility and student support through its claims as a vocational preparation for ‘professional communicators’” (Putnis, 1993, para. 4). The early development of professional communication courses was strongly influenced by US schools, offering a practical focus on mass communication, an emphasis on empirical research rather than cultural analysis, the unproblematic transmission of messages, and strong links with business education (Lewis, 1982; Putnis, 1986). However, some researchers argue the development of communication studies in Australia was unique, and did not emerge from the better established programs in the US. Maras (2006) maintains US communication studies emerged through doctoral programs offering professional training and qualifications and was related to “an advanced graduate and research-driven professionalisation of the field”; in contrast, he argues, the development of communication studies in Australia is closely linked to “the post-1970s expansion of the higher education system,” which offered innovative education in newer institutions (Maras, 2006, p. 44), as well as increased
employment opportunities through the growth in communication professions (Putnis, 1993).

By the late 1990s, communication studies was the largest field of study in the humanities in Australia (Putnis & Axford, 2002). Its success is attributed to the need for lower status institutions to expand their offerings through the introduction of new courses and double and postgraduate degrees, following the 1987 Dawkins and 1996 Vanstone reforms to the higher education sector (Borland, 1995; Maras, 2006). In a survey of communication studies courses at 33 tertiary institutions in Australia, Molloy and Lennie (1990) found communication studies was a broad field made up of almost 50 subjects. Many programs offered professional pathways to communication professions. The most common professional training in communication studies was journalism, which was offered at 64% of Australian tertiary institutions teaching communication studies, followed by television production (offered at 58% of institutions) and then public relations (offered at 48%, or 16 of the 33 institutions surveyed). According to the report, Communication Studies in Australia, approximately 1870 students were studying public relations at undergraduate level in 1990 (Molloy & Lennie, 1990, pp. 26–27).4 In contrast, Quarles and Potts (1990) identified 14 universities teaching individual public relations subjects, although only 10 universities offered degrees majoring in public relations.

However, communication studies struggled to gain academic legitimacy. As noted

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4 Putnis, Axford, Watson, and Blood (2002) state Molloy and Lennie’s (1990) figures rely on enrolment figures in individual subjects rather than in courses or majors, and therefore are somewhat inflated. In addition, I note Molloy and Lennie claim there were 60 public relations students at Murdoch University (1990, p. 52); however, Murdoch University did not teach a public relations subject until 2001 although it introduced communication studies in 1988 and offered a public relations stream prior to 2001 (Murdoch University, 1988, 1990, 2001). This discrepancy may stem from university-reported student numbers and contribute to the differences in numbers of universities teaching public relations given by Quarles and Potts (1990).
earlier in this chapter, the Australian education context contributed to this struggle, in that the lower status institutions teaching communication studies were more likely to focus on “vocational degrees and applied research” than “‘academic’ degrees and pure research” (Putnis, 1986, p. 144). The diversity of courses that made up communication studies, and the corresponding lack of an overarching theory did not help; even a decade later, US public relations scholar Heath, writing in the Australian Journal of Communication, refers to the fragmentation of communication studies, describing the field as “a wrangle of voices, a Tower of Babel, and a clash of vested interests” (1998, p. 49). The struggle for academic legitimacy was therefore not confined to public relations, but applied more broadly to the various courses that belonged to communication studies.

Significant tension was evident in the 1980s and 1990s between more traditional academic scholarship and vocationally oriented fields, which were perceived by some academics to be too practical for legitimate academic study. One ANZCA president described “bitter ideological conflicts” between the cultural studies theorists and the association because of the involvement of academics who were perceived to be more “functional” (Molloy, as cited in Maras, 2003, p. 5). He refers to the 1980s’

split in the association … when almost all the Cultural Studies people had left. They

5 One example is the conflict between cultural studies theorists and journalism educators in Australian universities, which erupted in the mid- to late 1990s. Given the conflict stemmed from tension between teaching professional practice and more critical fields, it is perhaps surprising that public relations educators did not participate in the debate; however, public relations faced fierce resistance from journalism academics (see Henningham, 1999), which presumably negated the possibility of an alliance. The “Media Wars” began with a keynote address by John Hartley at an ANZCA conference in 1995, which described journalism as a “terra nullius of epistemology” and argued that “journalism educators had failed to theorise their field” (Flew, Sternberg & Adams, 2007, p. 3). The strong response from journalism educators (see, for example, Breen, 1996, and Henningham, 1999) exposes the ideological conflict underpinning professional communication practices and their academic legitimacy, and in particular the deep division between the value of industry experience and more traditional academic scholarship.
thought they weren't getting a fair go in the conference programming, because it was being run by people who taught Business Communication, Corporate Communication, Public Relations—the functional, pragmatic areas.

Public relations also faced fierce resistance from other professional fields in communication studies; one journalism educator likened public relations to the manipulation and propaganda of Machiavelli and Goebbels, arguing: “the other dangerous bedfellow of journalism is public relations, and any self-respecting journalism school must resist the planting of PR and other forms of ‘persuasive communication’ within their department” (Henningham, 1999, p. 187). Intellectual tensions and academic rivalry occurred in the “culture wars” between scholars in theoretical and more vocational disciplines (Flew, Sternberg & Adams, 2007), between journalism and public relations (Henningham, 1999; McKie & Hunt, 1999), and marketing (and, to a lesser extent, advertising) and public relations (McKie & Hunt, 1999). In addition, there was fragmentation within communication management, as various fields – organisational communication, corporate communication, business communication – emerged alongside and considerably overlapped with the domain of public relations (Argenti, 1996; Zorn, 2002). These factors contributed to significant challenges for public relations gaining disciplinary status. On the one hand, communication studies offered public relations a disciplinary home in the academy; on the other hand, public relations competed with, and faced fierce resistance from, both more scholarly fields and co-emergent professional fields of study.

**Australian public relations scholarship.** Despite the challenges identified in the preceding section, I argue the growth of communication studies engendered and influenced
the development of public relations as a legitimate field of scholarly research in Australia. The role of a strong academic association, such as ANZCA, was critical in that it “provide[d] the space for a kind of legitimation,” playing “a major role in validating one’s academic work” for communication scholars whose fields often were not programmed at other academic conferences (Putnis, as cited in Maras, 2003, p. 8). Given the challenges to public relations’ academic legitimacy, I review in this section the emergence of public relations research in the Australian university sector in the 1980s and 1990s.

A focus on industry needs results in research, which reproduces knowledge – drawn from industry practice – rather than produces new kinds of knowledge (Jelen, 2008) and is perceived to interfere with the academic research agenda (L’Etang & Pieczka, 1996). Despite common practitioner perceptions, much of the research in Australia is focused very much on the industry (Byrne, 2007), to the extent (drawing on Pieczka and L’Etang, 2006) that it is arguably “self-serving” in that it explores how existing practice conforms to the dominant paradigm. I offered in the previous chapter examples of how widely accepted versions of the history of public relations in Australia also conform to the dominant paradigm, in that they understand public relations’ steady progression towards professional standing. To offer an example of how industry constructs particular understandings of “best practice” with implications for scholarship, I point to studies that have analysed award winning entries to the PRIA Golden Target Awards as examples of “best practice” in Australia (see Walker, 1994; Xavier, Johnston, & Patel, 2006; and Xavier, Patel, Johnston, & Sambath, 2004). There are significant issues associated with the use of award entries in this way, given submissions are specifically written for the purposes of winning an award and address pre-determined categories such as research, objectives, and evaluation, which
structure the submission in terms of understandings of professional work (Pieczka, 2002, 2007). As only PRIA members can apply, the database of award entries does not reflect the breadth and diversity of public relations work in Australia. Finally, to understand public relations work, the value of studying award entries is limited; they do not include campaigns that were not effective, where the client or project demands confidentiality, or where things went wrong (although such studies arguably could be useful case studies for research). Nevertheless, such studies support the conceptualisation of public relations’ “best practice” as defined by the professional association whose mission is to establish public relations as a profession.

As I identified in the previous chapter, there was a significant increase in public relations scholarship in Australia in the second half of the 1990s that began to question industry conceptualisations and investigated public relations more broadly. According to the editor of the ANZCA-supported *Australian Journal of Communication*, Ros Petelin, who had been in that role since 1988, the significant growth in public relations scholarship allowed her to commission the special issue in 1997; nearly a decade later, Petelin identifies that issue as a catalyst for “greater global openness” and its confirmation of “the existence of a critical mass of PR theorists in Australasia” (Petelin, 2005, p. 460). This issue was edited by Shirley Leitch, a then-New Zealand based academic, and Gael Walker, a public relations lecturer at University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) and NEC member. Contributions to the special issue of the *Australian Journal of Communication* in 1997 included papers by several of the now-leading critical public relations scholars: Jacquie L’Etang; Shirley Leitch; David McKie; Judy Motion; and Magda Pieczka. The issue was a significant collection of public relations scholarship, primarily outside the dominant

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6 The final issue of the *Australian Journal of Communication* was published in December 2013.
paradigm of US scholarship (an exception was Walker’s [1997] article, which presented findings from an Australian study around practitioner use of research and evaluation and was modelled on a US study). A subsequent issue of the journal reveals conflicting understandings of where public relations belonged in the academy. Steiner (1998) blamed the location of public relations within media and communication faculties, rather than business schools, for the lack of “real world” and business understanding in public relations graduates, arguing the arts did not have a positive attitude towards business activities and aims (see also Steiner, 2001, and Steiner & Black, 2000). Motion and Leitch (1998) mounted a robust defence and re-articulated the need for alternative perspectives in public relations scholarship.

The first Australian academic journal dedicated to public relations, the Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal, was launched in 1999. Various articles in the early issues identify significant concerns around the disciplinary status of public relations, exploring, for instance, the need for localised knowledge (Motion & Leitch, 1999) and demarcation disputes with co-emergent fields of study such as journalism, advertising, and marketing (McKie & Hunt, 1999). Other articles focused on public relations education (see Anderson, 1999, in the inaugural issue, and Walker, 2000). A significant growth occurred in public relations scholarship outside the dominant paradigm in the late 1990s, offering multiple, conflicting, and at times critical perspectives of public relations and the constitution of public relations knowledge. According to Johnston and Macnamara, there was “a significant shift in thinking from the previously accepted North American-centric approaches to university teaching and scholarship” in Australia in this decade (2013, p. 1).
Public Relations in Australian Higher Education

Public relations education and training. Scholars suggest the first Australian university course was a Diploma of Arts (Public Relations) at Mitchell College of Advanced Education (now Charles Sturt University [CSU]) and that it was offered in 1969 (ANZCA, n.d.; Hatherell & Bartlett, 2006; Zawawi, 2009); 1970 (Quarles, 1993; Quarles & Rowlings, 1993); or 1971 (Gleeson, 2012; Starck, 1999). Much of this information is based on the testimony of David Potts, who developed the Mitchell College diploma course. Even Potts acknowledges in various interviews that the course was offered “around 1970” and alludes that it may have been contemporaneous with a QIT course (Starck, 1999; Potts, 2008). Potts (2008) states he was commissioned to develop the course in 1970 while working at Eric White Associates. Gleeson (2012), drawing on a contemporaneous PRIA publication, asserts the course commenced in 1971. The recent commendation for a Medal for the Order of Australia for David Potts’ contributions to public relations education states he was employed at Mitchell College from 1971 (PRIA, 2012b). The CSU archivist identifies that the first record of Diploma of Arts (Public Relations) graduates is in 1974, suggesting the three-year diploma course commenced in 1971, and that the Diploma became a Bachelor-level course in 1974 (P. O'Donnell, personal communication, September 10, 2012). Potts (1976) states the first students graduated at the end of 1973 (supporting a commencement year of 1971), but, confusingly, states in the same text the students began in 1970. On the balance of available evidence, it is likely the Mitchell College course was first offered at diploma level in 1971. In comparison to developments elsewhere, individual public relations subjects were available as early as the 1920s in the US; however, the first university-level degree course was a Master of Science in Public
Relations, offered by Boston University in 1947 (Wright, 2011). In contrast, tertiary public relations courses in the UK were only introduced in 1988, when a postgraduate course was offered at the University of Stirling; undergraduate degrees were offered by three other UK institutions in the following year (L’Etang, 2004).

It is not simply the date of the Mitchell College course in question. In one of the few investigations of the historical development of public relations education in Australia, Gleeson (2014) found that the public relations industry and the professional association were interested in university-level public relations education as early as the 1950s. Gleeson identifies a number of challenges for the public relations historian in Australia, including the disparate archival collections of the state-based institutes. Gleeson’s investigation of South Australian and Victorian PRIA state council archives confirms widely accepted historical narratives that identify the Mitchell College diploma developed by David Potts the first university course are inaccurate. Gleeson argues undue weight was given to developments in New South Wales and Queensland and earlier developments in public relations education in other states were ignored.

There is evidence of non-degree public relations short courses, certificate courses, and associate diplomas available through private colleges, universities, and other higher education providers prior to the Mitchell College course. The American organisation, International Correspondence School, offered courses in advertising, marketing, media selection and campaign management in many countries, including Australia, as early as 1910 (Ellis & Waller, 2011). Occasional short courses were offered jointly by the Australian Institute of Management and the Public Relations Institute (Dwyer, 1961) and in 1965, a part-time evening course on public relations over a five-week period was offered.
by the NSW Institute of Technology (Gleeson, 2012, 2014). The University of New South Wales (UNSW) ran two series of ten evening lectures in conjunction with the Public Relations Institute in November and December 1965 and again in February and March 1966 (J. Nolan, personal communication, September 17, 2012). Although Gleeson claims UNSW was therefore “the first Australian university to offer post-graduate PR studies” through its Division of Postgraduate and Extension Studies in 1965 (2012, p. 2), the course brochure suggests otherwise. In addition, the university archivist confirms that although some of the division’s professional development courses could contribute to postgraduate qualifications, the public relations course was not one of them (K. Brennan, personal communication, September 18, 2012). As such, this course was a professional development or extension course, rather than a formal postgraduate offering.

Gleeson (2014) identifies a number of courses that were established following lobbying by PRIA state councils. These courses include a three-year, part-time certificate course at RMIT’s School of Management, introduced in 1964, and a three-year diploma course at the South Australian Institute of Technology, introduced in 1967 (Gleeson, 2014). The RMIT course, modelled on one offered at the Boston College’s School of Communication, was upgraded to an Associate Diploma in Management (Public Relations) in 1967 (Gleeson, 2014). In contrast, the marketing industry was more successful in

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7 Karin Brennan, UNSW archivist, provided copies of two documents to the researcher. The brochure, “A course in public relations,” states that the ten lectures were provided by the UNSW Division of Postgraduate and Extension Studies “in conjunction with Public Relations Institute of Aust. (NSW)” and refers to “Nov–Dec 1965”; there is a handwritten annotation of “Repeated Feb/Mar 1966” (p. 1). The second document, “A summary of lectures given in a course on public relations,” consists of the first three pages of a longer brochure, and lists the lecture topics and lecturers [photocopies in possession of the author]. Five course lecturers were from the university, with backgrounds in law and criminology, marketing, and psychology, and three lecturers were from industry and included the president of the PRIA national council and the director of Eric White Associates. Some lecturers gave more than one lecture and five of the ten lectures were provided by the psychology department.
lobbying established universities to introduce marketing courses; the prestigious UNSW established a chair in marketing in 1965 (Ellis & Waller, 2011). The existence of these courses points to an earlier history of Australian public relations education and training than is usually acknowledged in the literature. Significantly, Gleeson (2014) identifies the alignment of many of these earlier courses (that is, pre-1970) with business faculties and calls for further research to understand why this alignment was lost.

In addition to Mitchell College, other institutions began to introduce public relations subjects and courses throughout the 1970s. In 1974, RMIT introduced a part-time Certificate in Business Studies (Public Relations) and the Queensland Institute of Technology (then QIT, now QUT) introduced a three-year Bachelor of Business (Communication). The Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT)’s English Department included a single public relations subject in its writing course in 1976 (Potts, 1976). More institutions offered public relations courses in the 1980s. WAIT – later Curtin University – introduced a Bachelor of Business (Public Relations) in 1986 and Ku-ring-gai College of Advanced Education (now UTS) taught the first graduate course, a graduate diploma in communication management, in 1983 (Quarles & Rowlings, 1993). QIT offered a Master’s degree in mass communication, which allowed students to focus on either advertising, electronic and print journalism, or public relations, in 1985 (“PR Masters Degree,” 1985).

Public relations courses grew increasingly popular with students in the mid- to late eighties, with reports of significant growth in student numbers. Deakin University doubled the enrolment numbers in its Management Communication course in the late eighties,

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8 Articles in the PRIA state council’s newsletter note the Western Australian course is fully accredited by national council and confirm the existence of a WAIT Liaison Committee (“National Council Accredits,” 1984; “WAIT Degree Course,” 1985).
identifying a significant increase from 1987 (Quarles & Potts, 1990). Similar trends were noted at University College of Central Queensland and CSU, while UTS received 2000 applications for the 160 places in its communication degree in 1989 (Quarles & Potts, 1990). Other universities report steady increases in enrolments in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with one university confirming its public relations student numbers grew from an initial intake of 52 in 1987 to a 1993 intake of 103.9. Quarles and Rowlings (1993) note the substantial development of tertiary programs in public relations in the previous decade, particularly in the five years prior to 1992. By 1990, there were 14 courses at tertiary level with a public relations component in Australia (Quarles & Potts, 1990).

In the 1990s, along with significant growth in the number of undergraduate courses, the number of postgraduate courses more than doubled. This trend mirrors that of communication studies. There was “a massive proliferation of coursework Master's programs” as well as double degrees in communication studies in this decade (Borland, 1995, p. 23). I have appended tables documenting the institutions that offered PRIA-accredited courses (see Appendix A) and the growth in accredited courses (see Appendix B) in the 1990s. These tables demonstrate that the number of accredited undergraduate and postgraduate public relations courses in Australia doubled in the 1990s, with increasingly specialised courses, in the form of named degrees, on offer.

The PRIA sought significant involvement in the development and regulation of public relations training in part to maintain a jurisdiction over public relations activity. Anderson, the PRIA (NSW) state president in 1990, wrote the PRIA: “must be in the

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market because of the shysters that ‘float’ through with their one day PR certificates!”

However, the PRIA’s involvement in public relations education was a profitable activity for the PRIA (NSW) state council in the early 1990s, as the council generated revenue through professional development courses (“APBC Offers First,” 1990; Ray, 1991). The PRIA (NSW) state council collaborated with the Australian Progressive Business College (APBC) in the late 1980s in Sydney to develop a part-time, year-long evening course, and by 1991 the course was full (“PRIA [NSW] to Run PR courses,” 1990). David Potts and John Bulbeck (who had retired from UTS) ran various courses, including an eight-week introductory course and a 12-month program; Marjorie Anderson (PRIA state president), David Potts, and Lyn MacIver (a UTS lecturer) were on the management committee (“APBC Offers First,” 1990; “Report on Education,” 1990). The PRIA (NSW) earned $4165 from the arrangement with APBC in 1991 and anticipated earning significantly more the following year (“Education Venture’s First,” 1992).

The early Australian public relations curriculum. Given I link public relations education specifically with discourse production, and in tandem, the constitution of public relations knowledge, I survey in this section the content considered appropriate for public relations courses in the 1970s and 1980s. That is, I investigate the public relations curriculum, in terms of the individual subjects taught in public relations courses to understand how universities constituted the public relations body of knowledge, or at the very least, understood the learning outcomes for a public relations course of study. This approach allows me to consider shifts in foci and indeed in disciplinary alliances in course

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10 Anderson, M. (1991, June 2). [Letter to Tony Stevenson]. Anderson archives (File 1). Professor Stevenson of the Communication Centre at QUT was commissioned by the PRIA around 1990 to investigate the future of public relations; the report was never made publicly available (Quarles & Rowlings, 1993; Gleeson, 2012).
development. I draw on Leask’s definition of the formal curriculum as “the sequenced programme of teaching and learning activities and experiences organised around defined content areas, topics, and resources, the objectives of which are assessed in various ways” (2009, p. 207). The development of a curriculum offers important insights into the emergence of various courses and attempts to establish disciplinary boundaries.

The Diploma of Arts (Public Relations) offered at Mitchell College in the early 1970s shared a common first year with the three-year diploma course in journalism; however, public relations students enrolled in an organisation theory subject in lieu of an optional elective. The course can best be described as “interdisciplinary.” In first year, students completed individual subjects in English, writing, linguistics, organisation theory, and psychology. In second year, students enrolled in English, psychology, political studies, mass communication, and public relations subjects; in their third year, they studied English, public relations, film and video, journalism, and economics.\(^{11}\) This curriculum suggests the course offered a mixture of arts and social sciences, and public relations was only one unit in a very generalist and genuinely interdisciplinary course. In 1974, Mitchell College introduced a Bachelor of Arts through its general studies programme, stating in the handbook the aim is “the provision of courses in applied arts and sciences to prepare students for vocational areas which are relatively new or for which formal training has not been readily available before at tertiary level.”\(^{12}\) Students could choose professional majors in journalism, public relations, or communication. Although students enrolled in one

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communication subject each semester, which was exclusive to their major, they were expected to select additional majors from the following disciplines: English, drama, political science, economics, psychology, sociology, history, and geography. In addition, students had to enrol in one sub-major from any of the above, or in legal studies, accountancy, marketing, organisational studies, mathematics, and public administration. Therefore, expectations at Mitchell College for a public relations bachelor course were of a generalist arts education, which was interdisciplinary, or least multidisciplinary. Students could choose to supplement their studies with more business-oriented units, although this was not compulsory. There is limited public relations-specific content, with the exception of one subject in each semester; rather, the emphasis was a broad and interdisciplinary education. In the same year, 1974, QIT introduced a Bachelor of Business (Communication), aimed at students seeking careers in journalism, advertising, and public relations (Potts, 1976). Students studied only one public relations unit, as well as “communication theory, writing and language, economics, advertising, behavioural science and a choice of business units” (Potts, 1976, p. 25).

In parallel with the significant growth in student numbers, the communications studies curriculum was a topic of major concern for communication studies academics in the mid- to late 1980s. In a working party report and discussion paper, The communication curriculum: Educating communication practitioners, Putnis notes that communication studies is:

viewed not so much as a distinct discipline with its own body of knowledge and theoretical framework, but rather a field of study which necessitates a multi-disciplinary approach. As a curriculum idea, “communication” provides an
organizing focus for input from a number of disciplines usually psychology, sociology, linguistics and cultural studies. (1988, p. 32)

Some courses were marketed as generalist courses for a range of communication professions while others worked hard to develop links with industry associations and incorporate work experience courses (Putnis, 1988). Putnis identifies the institutionalisation of “the division between the makers and the critics/theorists … in terms of the educational processes deemed appropriate for each role” (1988, p. 38). Drawing on the discussion with communications studies educators from four institutions at an ACA seminar in Queensland March 1988, he concludes that “Australian communications departments must foster “amicable cohabitation” and constructive dialogue between practitioners and critics” (Putnis, 1988, p. 39). However, different institutions embraced different approaches. Murdoch University (1988), for instance, offered what they described in their handbook as generalist communications courses emphasising theory and analysis, which potentially could lead to employment in diverse fields. In contrast, QIT’s School of Communication offered a business degree, which allowed students to combine a core of communication theory units emphasising Australian society with a professional major such as journalism, public relations, and advertising (QIT, 1988, as cited in Putnis, 1988).

With the launch of the Bachelor of Business (Public Relations) at WAIT in 1986, a call was made in the PRIA (WA) newsletter for “experienced practitioners to assist the academic staff with lectures, workshops, seminars and tutorials” (“Can You Help,” 1986; “Public relations course,” 1986). The article stated that “tertiary qualifications are not necessary” as “the most important attributes … are experience and skill in one or more aspect of public relations.” Another article announces the appointment of “the first full time
teacher” for the WAIT course, June Dunstan, whose qualifications included a “BA majoring in English (journalism) with minors in TV studies and Australian history (“June Dunstan takes,” 1986). More significantly, Dunstan offered “extensive PR experience” in the not-for profit and university sectors and was an early member of the PRIA (WA) state council. In fact, the course was accredited by the PRIA national council in 1984, although it was not offered to students prior to 1986 (“National Council Accredits,” 1984). The PRIA (WA) state council claimed that:

> Half of the proposed WAIT course will be devoted to units which are genuine public relations units, including marketing management, consumer behaviour, market research and public relations. The remainder of the course will be split between journalism and management units. (“National Council Accredits,” 1984).

The business emphasis is not surprising as this particular course was offered in a business school. Nevertheless, in 1984, units with a strong marketing orientation were deemed public relations units, suggesting a significant lack of distinction between public relations and marketing. In 1989, Curtin University recruited an American academic, Dr Gerry Egan, described as “experienced in public relations roles in a variety of organisations,” who planned “to structure the Curtin PR course on the basis of practice of skills and involvement with the PR industry” suggesting that industry practice continued to be a significant referent for course design (“Curtin chatter,” 1989).

Another Western Australian tertiary institution, Western Australian College of Advanced Education (WACAE), that later became Edith Cowan University (ECU), developed a humanities course in conjunction with local PRIA members that included a public relations core of six units in 1990. These units included: “a detailed exploration of
the theories and models of communication, public relations, management and the psychosocial basis of public relations; the development of practical research, writing, oral presentation, planning and programming skills; the planning and evaluation of public relations applications in a wide variety of contexts; and a case study analysis of public relations in action.” (“Gae Takes Charge,” 1990). In addition, students spent 120 hours in their final semester working in a consultancy or organisation as part of a major project. By 1990, some universities were offering more than the broad generalist and interdisciplinary degree as preparation for a communication-related career and attempted to position public relations within communication theory, in contrast to the earlier course developed by WAIT. Some universities – such as Murdoch University, another Western Australian tertiary institution – offered a theoretical course focusing on communication studies rather than specific preparation for a career in advertising, public relations, or journalism. Other universities offered students a choice of vocationally-oriented subjects as preparation for a professional career in one of these areas, along with a theoretical core of generalist communication units. However, by 1990, several universities, such as Curtin University and WACAE/ECU, were developing public relations units, often in conjunction with industry practitioners. In the case of Curtin University, and perhaps to a lesser extent, ECU, these units focused on practical skill development to produce job-ready graduates for the industry.

There is evidence in PRIA state council archives of significant interaction between universities and their local state councils. For instance, PRIA (WA) newsletters regularly reported on the activities of their state council’s tertiary liaison committee, noting in 1990 “how tertiary liaison activities have grown out of all proportion and impose an increasing
strain upon the resources of council”; these activities included liaising with course controllers and the student chapters at Curtin University and WACAE; participating in student new member nights; organising two student days; and hosting Quarles on “her fact-finding visit in relation to the proposed national education policy” (“Committee Activities in Brief,” 1990). Another article, announcing the appointment of an experienced practitioner to run the public relations course at WACAE, describes course development in conjunction with the PRIA through regular meetings of “a PR Advisory Committee comprising both PRIA and WACAE representatives” (“Gae Takes Charge,” 1990). The PRIA (WA) state council was actively involved in higher education in a number of ways, offering student workshops and paid internships and encouraging students to attend the PRIA state convention (“Top Marks,” 1989; “Top offers,” 1989; “Student Workshop Gains,” 1989).

**Textbooks for Australian public relations education.** In the previous chapter, I suggested that public relations textbooks are strongly functionalist and practice-orientated. Indeed, one problem with public relations education is it “cannot always be simply distinguished from the practice, since many academics are practitioners and practitioner perspectives form the core of many academic programs” (McKie & Munshi, 2007, p. 12). Other problems, also identified in the previous chapter, include the uncritical reproduction of existing industry accounts and professional narratives, which confirm the field’s professional standing and status as a strategic management discipline. It is perhaps not surprising given the majority of Australian public relations textbooks, at least until 2000, were written mostly by practitioners (often senior PRIA members) and endorsed or in some cases – such as the 1976 textbook edited by Potts – even initiated by the PRIA. There is no
doubt that this strong practitioner focus was perceived by many in the industry as a strength. According to Potts:

Unlike many American books written by academics, this volume has been written by practising public relations professionals. Every graduate of an Australian public relations course will know the Tymson and Lazar book from cover to cover. They will have learned valuable lessons from it. (2008, p. 5)

The Australian textbook market was dominated by US textbooks, many of which were adopted by public relations educators (Alexander, 2004; Johnston & Macnamara, 2013; Petelin, 2005). The dearth of Australian resources was considered by educators and practitioners to be problematic. However, there were a number of early public relations manuals or handbooks, aimed at, and written by, practitioners such as *The Australian Public Relations Handbook* (Dwyer, 1961). Similar books aimed at practitioners were published in later decades (see, for example, Mathews, 1984; and Macnamara 1984; 1992; 1996; 2000). Petelin notes that Johnston and Zawawi’s (2000) textbook, *Public relations: Theory and practice*, was “the first substantial book collection by local writers that was more than a basic manual” (2005, p. 461). Similarly, McKie describes Johnston and Zawawi’s pluralist approach as “intelligently optimistic,” noting that the first edition “set a standard in having enough diverse authors and a marketing strategy able to compete with US textbooks in their country of origin” (2012, p. 110).

The PRIA commissioned a book, *Public Relations in Australia* (Potts, 1976), in the mid-1970s to serve as both a textbook and to promote what public relations could offer to senior managers. In the foreword, the PRIA national president notes that in the context of a broader scope for public relations activity and the increasing demand for specialist
communicators, “it is … a logical and proper responsibility of the Public Relations Institute of Australia … to support the production of a new and up-to-date book”; its aim is not “to produce solely a how-to-do-it book, but rather one that combines practical information with reasoning” and “to promote two-way communication” (Plater, 1976, p. iv). Scholars note the widespread influence of this book in the Australian education sector, and that it drew heavily on US textbooks, in particular Cutlip and Center (1971) (Johnston & Macnamara, 2013). The 31 chapters were written by high profile practitioners, many of who were former or serving PRIA councillors, state presidents, or national presidents. According to Potts, this book was “the standard text in Australian courses for a number of years” (2008, p. 4).

The PRIA-commissioned textbook (Potts, 1976) offers some insight into the way the industry constituted public relations knowledge, in terms of expectations of what should be included in a public relations textbook. Joel, identified in the book as playing a pivotal role in the development of public relations in Australia, wrote part of the first chapter. Two chapter authors (Potts, who was the overall editor, and Smith) were interviewed for the research reported in this thesis. In the second chapter, “The skills and training of a public relations practitioner,” Potts identifies the need for future practitioners to “come from tertiary education courses in public relations in which a broadly-based education is offered in addition to training in communication skills” as “since public relations practitioners are no longer simply publicists, the industry is relying less on journalists for recruits” (1976, p. 17).

The 26 chapters were written by practitioners and cover topics such as: public opinion; attitude research; public relations planning and administration; media relations;
films; exhibitions and displays; graphics and photography; and public relations in a range of sectors include corporate, financial, staff and employee, political, international, and marketing public relations. The textbook offers a comprehensive insight into the public relations-specific knowledge the industry, through the PRIA, considered necessary for future practitioners to gain, alongside, or as part of, a broad-based, general university education. This knowledge is functionalist; for example, the subheadings under “Administration of a PR consultancy” include “check the credit risk,” “tally the time,” “selling your services,” “assessing a fee,” “keeping control,” and “budgeting” (Sherman & Griffin, 1976, pp. 80–83).

Another Australian textbook was not produced until 1987. It was written by two practitioners and PRIA members, Candy Tymson (who was interviewed for this research, and in the early 1980s was PRIA national president) and Bill Sherman. Following Sherman’s retirement, Tymson edited new editions with high profile practitioners and father-son team Peter and Richard Lazar (Johnston & Macnamara, 2013). In total, there have been five editions of *The Australian and New Zealand Public Relations Manual*, with the most recent published in 2008. Its focus has remained practical.

Quarles and Rowlings’ (1993) book, produced in the early 1990s, was unusual in a number of ways. It was co-written by an academic and a senior practitioner, both of whom were active in the PRIA (VIC) state council. Dr Jan Quarles, an American public relations educator, worked in Australia from 1989 to 1994 and was interviewed for this research. She was also a member of the NEC in the early 1990s and played a key role in the industry.

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13 The titles and editors have changed slightly across different editions. The original title was *The Australian Public Relations Manual* (Tymson & Sherman, 1987). In 1996, the revised edition was titled *The New Australian and New Zealand Public Relations Manual* (Tymson & Sherman, 1996); a “21st century edition” with the same title was released in 2002, but edited by Tymson and Lazar (2002). The most recent edition was edited by Tymson, Lazar, and Lazar (2008).
accreditation of university courses. The book foregrounds Australia’s relationship with Asia; presumably it was informed both by Quarles’ undergraduate degree in Asian Studies and growing industry engagement with the Asian region in this period. The second chapter focuses specifically on the need for cultural competence in public relations practitioners, and subsequent chapters include case studies from Australia, Europe, and Asia. The book, written for the Australian market, has a notably global focus. According to Johnston and Macnamara (2013), it was reprinted in 1995 and 1996, but not updated following Quarles’ return to the US in 1994.

The state of public relations education. With the expansion of the Australian higher education sector, the relationship between industry and the academy changed and industry bodies in a number of fields played a significant role in defining university curricula through accreditation processes (Walkington & Vanderheide, 2008). The regulation of public relations education was an important component of the PRIA’s professional drive. In 1989, the PRIA national board funded a benchmark study into the state of public relations education in Australia. The board commissioned as authors Quarles, who was teaching at RMIT, and Potts, a senior practitioner and educator who developed the Mitchell College diploma course, taught public relations at both Ku-ring-gai College of Advanced Education and Mitchell College, and spent sabbaticals at universities in the US. At the time of writing the report, Potts had returned to industry and was working as a consultant. The aim of the report was “to provide a base of information for educational institutions” and its focus was on “the collation of information and research surrounding public relations education, its history, current trends and also the availability and types of resources” (Greenmount, 1990).
The 1990 report, *Public Relations Education in Australia*, drew on in-depth interviews with public relations educators, questionnaires, and supporting materials and found 14 higher education courses where public relations was taught as a major, minor or subject option. Ten courses were accredited; there is little information available as to what this accreditation involved but state-based PRIA councils, and subsequently the PRIA national board, endorsed public relations courses. Nineteen educators were employed on a fulltime basis, “with the most common profile being experience as a practitioner and a B.A. in communications or a related discipline” (Quarles & Potts, 1990, p. 32). Significantly, the report acknowledged the influence of US public relations education and scholarship and the widespread use of US textbooks, but recognised limitations with American approaches in the Australian context:

> It is important to note that, while Australian public relations education has its own history and strengths and cannot be based totally on a U.S. design, comparisons with U.S. education are useful because public relations education has been part of the profession there since 1923. (Quarles & Potts, 1990, p. 35)\(^\text{14}\)

In the same year, IPRA produced a report investigating global standards for public relations education that expressed “alarm [at] the proliferation of universities proclaiming their competence in public relations teaching and research without adequate resources” (1990, p. 5).\(^\text{15}\) IPRA recognised the challenge in developing accreditation criteria for public relations courses was “defining the body of knowledge upon which the criteria should be based,” given the lack of “all-embracing theory” and “conceptual framework” (IPRA, 1990, p. 25).

The Quarles and Potts (1990) report makes specific recommendations for university

\(^{14}\) Wright (2011) states the first public relations course in the US was taught at the University of Illinois in 1920, not 1923 as claimed by Quarles and Potts (1990).

\(^{15}\) A copy of the report is in the Anderson archives (File 1).
courses, with the inclusion of an appendix, “Guidelines for the accreditation of courses in public relations at Australian tertiary institutions.” The authors point to the lack of Australian research into public relations education and training, and acknowledge that these guidelines are “an adaptation to Australian conditions of research done in recent years by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and educators to determine the content of PR sequences at American colleges and universities” (Quarles & Potts, 1990, p. 47). The guidelines identify the need for public relations courses to cover writing, research and evaluation, strategic planning and management skills, internships, industry advisory committees, and business subjects (Quarles & Potts, 1990). These recommendations became the basis of the formal accreditation criteria for the PRIA, following the establishment of the NEC in 1990. Despite several revisions to accreditation criteria in the intervening period, these recommendations continued to inform PRIA accreditation guidelines and the design of university courses seeking industry accreditation.

At various stages in the 1980s and 1990s, a number of professional associations expressed an interest in accrediting public relations courses. In addition to efforts to represent public relations practitioners, as well as journalists, as discussed in the previous chapter, the AJA also sought to accredit university public relations courses (“AJA Interference,” 1993; “AJA Log of Claims,” 1992). Another organisation, the Australian Institute of Professional Communicators also planned to accredit courses and award scholarships (Starck, 1999, p. 156). However, the PRIA resisted and indeed contested attempts by other associations to accredit public relations courses and sought to maintain its jurisdiction over the industry accreditation of university public relations courses.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I offered evidence of the need to examine specific societal and structural factors, in order to understand the development of public relations education in Australia. A potential limitation in studying Australian public relations education is the dominance of a pioneer educator, David Potts; much of the evidence and information regarding early course development is generated by Potts who indeed played a pivotal role within the PRIA in the development and indeed industry regulation of public relations education. I acknowledge, too, my reliance on Potts’ testimony. For example, I draw on textbooks, memoirs, interviews, and information in PRIA newsletters and other industry publications for information on the development of Australian public relations education. I therefore recognise his influence on historical narratives of Australian public relations education, which continue to be reproduced in textbooks and by the professional association.

However, I argue the introduction of public relations education in Australia must be understood in relation to broader societal changes around higher education and the labour force in Australia and that archival and other kinds of research are needed to address the official PRIA – and Potts-inspired – understandings of how public relations education developed. That is, an uncritical acceptance of this perspective is problematic, and can only be countered through the introduction of other perspectives and documentary evidence.

Investigating the Australian context in relation to the introduction and development of public relations education led to a number of insights. The first insight develops ideas introduced in the previous chapter, and confirms the role university education plays in the PRIA’s professional project. However, a schism between practical and theoretical public
relations knowledge emerged, resulting in a contest over the constitution of public relations knowledge, which I argue played out over public relations education. The second insight highlights the significance of widespread changes in the Australian higher education, in terms of its massification and marketisation, in response to changes in government policy and funding, for public relations education. These changes resulted in the expansion of higher education, and the need for new and less established institutions to find diverse markets, primarily through the introduction of more vocational courses. After 1987, new markets were found in international undergraduate students and through increased offerings in postgraduate courses. A third, and related, insight is the significance of communication studies for public relations education. I argue communication studies provided a disciplinary home and, to an extent, legitimised public relations in the academy. It aligned public relations with a number of communication industries, including journalism and advertising, and offered opportunities for the scholarly development of public relations. The fourth insight develops the idea of disciplinarity for public relations in Australia. Drawing on Foucault, I suggested that disciplines set discursive limits on a field, offering an understanding of how the weak disciplinary boundaries of public relations, and indeed the competitive jostling with other co-emergent fields of study, contributed to demarcation and territorial disputes in the academy. The fifth insight emerges from my analysis of public relations curricula. Early Australian public relations courses offered a broad, general education mostly focused on a liberal arts education, and occasionally included more business-oriented subjects. In the 1970s, public relations was often a single unit or subject taught within a broader, interdisciplinary course. The growth in communication studies led to the introduction of media and communication units in public relations curricula in later
decades. An important finding in this chapter is that Australian public relations education developed in specific ways in response to the Australian social and political context. At the same time, the influence of US public relations textbooks and scholarship on Australian public relations was recognised. In my final insight, I offer further evidence in this chapter of the PRIA’s desire to regulate public relations education and training. At the end of the 1980s, the PRIA commissioned a “state of public relations education” report, which led to the establishment of the NEC and the introduction of a standardised, national accreditation program for university courses. The report authors adapted PRSA research and recommendations in relation to university public relations education. The role played by the industry in the regulation of public relations education, through the accreditation of public relations courses, requires further investigation in order to understand the constitution of public relations knowledge and the manifestation of power in relation to public relations education. In the following chapter, I outline the design of the research reported in this thesis in terms of my epistemological orientation; investigation of archival documents relating to the introduction of a national, accreditation program by the PRIA in 1991; and analysis of interviews with practitioners and educators regarding the role and development of public relations education in Australia.
Chapter 3: Research Design

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I explored the ways history has been used to confirm public relations’ evolutionary development towards professional status. In the previous chapter, I identified a need to investigate the role of the PRIA in regulating public relations education and training, in order to offer an alternative perspective on the historical development of public relations in Australia. By examining historical evidence contained in PRIA archives and through interviews with educators and practitioners, I propose to develop a more critical history of the development of public relations in Australia, focusing on public relations education as an important mechanism in professionalisation. I discuss in this chapter the research design and offer some reflections on the implications for the findings reported in this thesis. I use historical sociology to investigate the role of education in the PRIA’s professional project. I collected the research data for this study through two instruments:

- Archival research, focusing on the previously unstudied personal archives of the chair of the PRIA’s NEC in the 1990s, with reference to PRIA state and national archives; and

- Interviews with 14 practitioners and educators regarding their experiences, perceptions and recollections of public relations education, with a particular focus on the late 1980s and 1990s.

This chapter is structured in four sections. I first discuss historical sociology and the significance of this approach for developing a critical history. I then introduce archival research, and outline the PRIA archives I accessed for this research. I consider the challenges and limitations of archival research for this study. In the third section, I discuss
Interview research, the selection of interview participants, and identify the challenges of interview research and analysis. Finally, I outline my analytical approach, justifying the choice of two methods. I also offer some reflections on the challenges that emerged in the analysis of the interview data. I conclude by identifying the limitations of the research reported in this thesis.

Research questions. Drawing on the background literature I presented in the previous two chapters, and after immersing myself in the data, I developed the following research questions:

- What is the relationship between the regulation of public relations education and professionalisation in the Australian context?
- What is the significance of gender for public relations education?
- How did the PRIA understand public relations knowledge?
- What was the impact of changes in the Australian higher education sector on public relations education?
- What challenges did public relations face in gaining academic legitimacy in Australia?

Research ethics. All research reported in this thesis was conducted in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). Participation in the interviews was voluntary and participants were informed they had the opportunity to withdraw from the study. Participants were offered the option of being identified in any publications arising from the research and ten chose to be identified.

I originally applied for an ethics permit from Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee in 2010 for a project on public relations education and received
formal approval (Ethics Permit 2010/158 “History of public relations education in Australia”). I applied separately for an ethics permit to interview female practitioners regarding their experiences in the Australian industry (Ethics Permit, 2011/137 “Experiences of Australian female public relations practitioners”). These projects were linked by the use of snowballing, the years under study, the context of the study, and the emergence of education’s significance for the industry’s professionalisation as an important theme. I therefore chose to use data from this second study in this research, and to treat these participants as key informants for this study. Participants were provided with feedback on the findings relating to feminisation and professionalisation, and on the research findings that are reported in this thesis, acknowledging that education had emerged as a significant theme. The feedback provided to all participants is included in Appendices D and E.

**Historical Sociology and Critical History**

In Chapter 1, I discussed the development of a critical history and described the significance of Foucault’s ideas, particularly in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, for historical method. Rather than treating history and historical evidence as a window to the past, a critical history reveals alternative perspectives and underlying ideologies, including those of the historian (Pearson, 2009). Critical histories should problematise the way history is used, in that they interrogate taken-for-granted accounts and official histories (Dean, 1994; L’Etang, 1995). Critical histories are “rooted in present-day concerns even as they reject the present as a necessary endpoint of historical trajectories” (Dean, 1994, p. 22). Motion and Weaver (2005) identified the value of adopting a Foucauldian discursive approach to public relations research, in that it “offers critical scholars a mode for
researching and theorizing the public relations practices that structure societal systems of knowledge and beliefs” (2005, p. 64). This approach is relevant for my thesis because I am trying to understand the factors that shaped contemporary public relations education in Australia. Rather than viewing the introduction of public relations to university-level education as evidence of the field’s professional development, I consider instead the ways in which, and why, the PRIA sought to regulate public relations education.

I use historical sociology to develop this critical history. Historical sociology draws on historical data and techniques to develop sociological interpretation and analysis (Dean, 1994; L’Etang, 1995, 2014). This approach allows me to problematise public relations’ education history and to interrogate progressivist narratives of the development of public relations in Australia. L’Etang describes her historical research on British public relations as “historical sociology,” that is, “work that uses historical data to support sociological interpretation and analysis” (2004, p. 254). L’Etang argues that public relations history, as an exploration of “the source and processes of institutional change,” needs both history and sociology (1995, p. 14). In this thesis, therefore, I explore the changing concerns of the industry in relation to the institutionalisation of public relations in the academy during a period of significant growth in the number of both students and courses. Focusing on education as an important mechanism of professionalisation, I draw on literature on the sociology of the professions, and in particular, on the body of work exploring professionalisation and public relations developed primarily by Magda Pieczka and Jacquie L’Etang. However, I situate my study in the Australian context.

**Locating the researcher.** I work within a social constructivist epistemology for the research reported in this thesis. This epistemological orientation influences the research
questions I developed as well as the decisions I made around data collection and analysis. For instance, I do not believe historical sources, be they archives or interviews with participants in historical events offer “a direct, unmediated and uncomplicated access to the past” (Thomson, 2012, p. 102). Instead, constructivist approaches “provoke questions about how social realities are produced, assembled, and maintained” (Holstein & Gubrium 2008, pp. 374–375) and therefore suit my interest in investigating how particular understandings of public relations and public relations education in Australia became widely accepted. In addition, I recognise that as a researcher I am not a neutral instrument or data collector but part of the meaning-making that occurs through data collection, analysis, and interpretation and in the construction of an historical narrative. I therefore acknowledge my subjectivity in this study by identifying my involvement with the field under study as well as my philosophical orientation to history and research.

I acknowledge my ongoing association with the PRIA. I did not join the PRIA until I was employed as a full-time public relations lecturer, when it became necessary for the accreditation of the university’s public relations course. I played an active role in the PRIA (WA) state council in 2005–2008, representing my university and the education sector. In 2008, I was elected to represent WA on the NEC, and remained in this role until the end of 2011. In this capacity, I reviewed accreditation submissions from various universities outside my home state. My PRIA membership and involvement with the NEC facilitated access to various participants in this study, some of whom were keen to see the history of Australian public relations education written and their role recognised. Interview participants, therefore, may have been more willing to participate in this research project, in that they perceived I was part of their professional network. In addition, my association
with the PRIA and the NEC may have facilitated access to various PRIA archives, although, as I discuss below, locating and gaining access to PRIA archives was not straightforward.

My association with the PRIA means that I am aware of ongoing discussions around the role of public relations education in Australia. In many ways, it is this association, which led me to this study. As a public relations academic, I see value in exploring the underlying ideologies and values, which inform current understandings of public relations. I am interested in learning how particular discourses emerged, became prominent, and continue to inform contemporary expectations of, and discussions around, public relations education and, more broadly, the role of public relations in society.

**Qualitative research and emergent data.** The research presented in this thesis is exploratory. I chose a qualitative approach as it is “adaptable, unfolding as it goes” (Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p. 26), and “open-ended,” allowing me to follow emergent empirical and conceptual findings in unexpected ways (Adler & Adler, 2012, p. 8). This approach is particularly apt for this research as qualitative researchers often need to immerse themselves in data and fieldwork before determining their focus (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). I did not know, for instance, what I might find out through the initial interview with David Potts, and whether this interview would simply be a single interview with one key informant. I also did not know what data existed and might be accessed in terms of PRIA records around public relations education when I first enrolled in doctoral studies.

Another example of the need for adaptability is my decision to use data from key informants in an historical study exploring the impact of gender on female practitioners in
Australia. Gender emerged as a significant theme in the first interview phase for this study into public relations education, and Phase 1 participants suggested possible participants for a collaborative research project I was about to commence with Amanda Third exploring gender and the Australian public relations industry. I have reported the findings on the feminisation and professionalisation of Australian public relations elsewhere (see Fitch & Third, 2014). In this thesis I return to these interview transcripts to focus on university education, particularly as several participants played key roles in the PRIA in relation to education. The emergence of public relations education as a key theme meant that these interviews offered unexpectedly rich material for the research reported in this thesis. In addition, one participant, Marjorie Anderson, offered the researcher access to her personal archives in relation to NEC activities in the 1990s.

**Investigating PRIA Archives**

**Archival research and PRIA archives.** Archival research poses a number of challenges, particularly around issues of access, completeness, and interpretation. The recognition of archives, and indeed of archivisation, as historical processes subject to political concerns and as sites of contested meaning is relevant for the research reported in this thesis because it identifies how these processes inform the knowledge that is produced and constituted (King, 2012). Archives are collected for a variety of purposes; however the decisions made around the act of collecting, preserving, and determining access to archives are not neutral. That is, archives are not static and neutrally collated records but, as Cook notes, they are “collected … weeded, reconstituted, even destroyed” and “there is nothing neutral, objective or even ‘natural’ about this process of remembering and forgetting” (2001, p. 9). The archivist is, as Ketelaar notes “a boundary keeper” in terms of selecting
what is and what is not kept (2001, p. 136), in the process asserting what is and what is not relevant for the organisation and constituting its identity. The significance is that archival collections “constrain the types of histories made possible and impossible through them” (King, 2012, p. 17). I therefore describe in this chapter my journey in researching PRIA records to demonstrate how issues of access and (in)completeness influenced the design, focus, and findings of the research reported in this thesis. In doing so, I note that historians increasingly offer stories of archival access and research in order to highlight the methodological foundations of historical research (King, 2012).

Shifts in the perceptions of archives from “fixed and firm” to something much more “fluid and flexible” points to the very instability of archives, as “unwritten, subversive, partial and exposed” (King, 2012, p. 14). Not only are the gaps and exclusions significant, but as Steedman notes “you find nothing in the Archive but stories caught half way through: the middle of things, discontinuities” (2002, p. 45). As I discussed in Chapter 1, Foucault argues history does not interpret a primary source so much as “organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, describes unities, describes relations” (Foucault, 1972, pp. 6–7). Archival research is therefore repositioned as a dynamic process rather than a static collection of records and every act of citing, presenting, explaining, and discussing archives is part of an ongoing process of archivisation (Cook, 2001). This process is never complete but “always tentative and subject to constant reinterpretation” (Hill, 1993, p. 69). The incompleteness of archives and the lack of archival records are significant challenges to the construction of an historical narrative, and new historical sources and interpretation allow new narratives to be written.
Archives, however, are impossible to investigate without a specific vision of history in order to reduce a mass of material to an historical narrative (Steedman, 2002). Indeed, I have tremendous sympathy for L’Etang who likened developing an historical narrative out of masses of data in archives as “more akin to triage than scholarship” (L’Etang, 2008b, p. 325).

Archival research presents challenges in identifying, locating, and interpreting relevant documents and I experienced all these challenges in the course of this research. Welch identifies five stages in archival research: discovery, access, assessment, sifting, and cross-checking and notes it is a “time-consuming and occasionally frustrating” research method (2000, p. 207). As public relations “history is, to some extent, written around available data, and the reader is thus reliant upon the historian to be open about the limitations of sources and access, as well as their authorial interpretive processes” (L’Etang, 2008b, p. 326), I acknowledge some difficulty in accessing PRIA records and the poor documentation of public relations history in Australia (Turner, 2002; Sheehan, 2007). My initial enquiries to the PRIA in 2010 regarding the existence of archives went unanswered and I was then informed by PRIA state and national offices there were none. However, in the last two years of my candidature, I gained access to three separate collections of PRIA documents. I was offered access to the Anderson archives when I interviewed Marjorie Anderson in October 2011. I collected the archives, consisting of two files, on a visit to Sydney in November 2011 and subsequently sought written permission from Anderson to use these archives for this research. I learnt of the existence of PRIA (National) and PRIA (NSW) archives through the Media Archives Project (see https://mediaarchivesproject.mq.edu.au) late in 2012. Thirty-two boxes of unsorted
archives had recently been deposited as a special collection in the Mitchell Library and were yet to be catalogued; I sought permission from the PRIA to access and copy these archives on a subsequent visit to Sydney in November 2012. During my visit to the Mitchell Library, I focused on the boxes that included newsletters and national board minutes relating to the 1990s. Finally, the PRIA (WA) state president revealed in conversation at the PRIA national conference later that month that boxes of PRIA (WA) state council records were stored in the executive officer’s private garage. I was invited to consult these archives, and visited the executive officer in December 2012 as they were sorting the records with a view to getting rid of “unnecessary” documents. I had the opportunity to peruse all boxes and to photograph many documents (and persuade the officer not to throw out anything other than duplicate copies). In addition, the executive officer loaned me an incomplete collection of PRIA (WA) and PRIA (National) newsletters dating from 1984 to 2000. I subsequently gained formal approval from the PRIA to use all these records for the research reported in this thesis.

Given the lack of documented history of Australian public relations (Turner, 2002), these various PRIA archives are an important historical resource. I focus in this thesis on the Anderson archives, which document (albeit incompletely) the interaction between the PRIA and the academy, and between the NEC and various PRIA national and state committees, including the National Board. In part, the decision to focus on the Anderson archives is due to timing: I had access to the Anderson archives for 12 months prior to other archives, allowing me the unique opportunity to research these previously unstudied NEC records. However, the PRIA (National), PRIA (NSW), and PRIA (WA) archives offer additional insights into PRIA processes and concerns and assist in understanding the
historical context for the findings emerging from my analysis of both the Anderson archives and the interviews. I therefore draw on these archives as evidentiary sources, both in relation to the analysis of the Anderson archives and the interview transcripts, and in Chapters 1 and 2 to understand the historical context.

**Investigating the Anderson archives.** The significance of the Anderson archives is that they offer a partial record of the first two five-year cycles of a national accreditation process introduced by the PRIA in 1991. Universities could apply for accreditation at any time, although in the first round their accreditation would only be granted until the end of 1996.\(^1\) The next accreditation phase was promoted in 1996, and extended from 1997 until December 2001. Analysis of these archives reveals PRIA’s deliberations and concerns in relation to the emergence and establishment of national standards for public relations education. As such, the files contain an incomplete record of how the industry, through the formal structures of the professional association, constituted public relations knowledge and expertise in terms of what *should* be included in public relations education. Analysis of the Anderson archives therefore offers insights into how the PRIA constituted public relations knowledge and attempted to regulate the transmission of that knowledge.

The Anderson archives consist of two files. Each file is labelled 2007–2008, despite their contents dating from approximately 1990–1996 (File 1) and approximately 1997–2001 (File 2). Presumably, given the later label date, some “weeding” may have occurred. These files do not contain a complete record of the deliberations of the NEC in the 1990s, but include correspondence to and from the chair of that committee, along with the chair’s own file notes. Documents include letters, meeting minutes, file notes, memoranda, speech

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notes, draft media releases, promotional copy, and handwritten file notes. Some documents are on original facsimile paper and the type is fading and not always legible; a few documents have handwritten annotations. The documents are unnumbered and not in date order, although some documents are filed in sections by university name. These diverse documents record, albeit with gaps, the first decade of the NEC. The files also contain formal correspondence between universities and the PRIA regarding accreditation. They do not contain university submissions (with one exception in File 2). There are differences in content: File 1 refers to various NEC activities beyond the accreditation of university courses, whereas File 2 primarily contains documents relating to university courses. My analysis therefore reflects the data in each file. I report the findings that emerged from my analysis of File 1 in Chapter 4, and the findings that emerged from my analysis of File 2 in Chapter 5.

**Investigating Practitioner and Educator Perceptions**

**Interviews in public relations research.** As discussed in Chapter 1, existing histories of Australian public relations rely primarily on practitioner perspectives, focusing on the field’s development towards professional standing. The result is a narrow conceptualisation of public relations and “an untheorized and uncritical endorsement of personal narratives” (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997, p. 322). However, I chose to use interviews to gain insights into historical processes and what L’Etang calls “multiple truths, alternative visions and critical perspectives” (2008, p. 249). Interviews can usefully address the limitations of archival research, including gaps in the archives and the lack of documentation of (particularly, informal) processes and discussions that contribute to decisions (Tansey, 2007). In addition, interviews with elite participants offer in-depth
insights and perspectives on historical events (Tansey, 2007).

As in the collection and interpretation of archives, “interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 646). I adopt a critical approach, avoiding the assumption that an interview provides an accurate insight into an unmediated and authentic “reality” or to participants’ innermost thoughts or experiences (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Daymon & Holloway, 2011; Silverman, 2010). I consider interviews offer narrative accounts, in which participants order their social reality, rather than strictly factual accounts of events (Thomson, 2007; Silverman, 2010). These narratives emerge from “active interaction” with the interviewer, “leading to negotiated, contextually based results” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 646). Similarly, Holstein and Gubrium acknowledge that far from the “transmission of information,” the knowledge obtained through interviews is “both collaboratively produced and continually under construction” (2008, p. 388). Both the interviewer and the interviewee are therefore active participants in the construction of that narrative.

Participants represent a diverse range of experiences and contributed to public relations education in different ways. Drawing on Thomson (2011), the ways in which they remember and reconstruct their memories and perceptions of public relations education is significant to this study, as they offer evidence of the discourses, which informed – and I argue, continue to inform – public relations education in Australia. I acknowledged issues with histories drawn from the perspective of prominent practitioners in Chapter 1, particularly in relation to their role in developments they perceive as significant. Given the active involvement of participants in the PRIA, often at senior levels, I consider more fully the implications of snowball sampling that led to an “intersecting elite” (L’Etang, 2004, p.
17) of senior PRIA members below. Researchers need to adopt a reflexive approach and to confirm information provided in interviews with other evidentiary sources. I incorporate reference to archival and secondary sources in my analysis of the interviews in Chapter 6 and reflect in this chapter on the challenges I faced in analysing the interview data and the significance of these challenges for the research findings.

**Recruiting and interviewing key informants.** I interviewed 14 practitioners and educators who were involved in Australian public relations education and/or the industry during the late 1980s and 1990s. Given the exploratory nature of qualitative research, there is little agreement on an appropriate number of interviews, although suggestions of between 12 and 60 are common (Adler & Adler, 2012), and it is difficult to establish the precise number of interviews at the outset (Baker & Edwards, 2012). I did not aim for random sampling, representativeness, or saturation. Tansey (2007) describes these concepts as inappropriate for elite interviews, which seek information about specific events and processes from participants in those activities and that randomness therefore should be reduced. I interviewed equal numbers of men and women, seeking participants who had prominent roles in the public relations industry or in public relations education. The first participant self-selected and subsequent participants were recruited via snowball sampling or identified through archival research. I include an interview schedule in Appendix C recording interview dates, participant names (where participants chose to be identified), brief biographical information on their role or roles in relation to public relations education and practice, and PRIA membership status.

In the first year of my candidature, as a member of the NEC, I received meeting papers with the single line: “David Potts would like someone to write a history of PR
education in Australia” (J. Kenny, personal communication, May 10, 2010). Given public relations education was the focus of my doctoral research, I contacted the PRIA’s National Education Officer, Julian Kenny, and received the following response: “David Potts … just mentioned in conversation that he established the first PR degree in Australia, he laid down the rules of accreditation and he’d like someone to capture this significant period” (J. Kenny, personal communication, May 12, 2010). I followed up directly with Potts, and we agreed to an interview later in the year. That interview took place in December 2010 (see Appendix C), and in the interview, Potts suggested a number of people I should interview for this study.

The interviews for this research were conducted in three distinct phases: Phase 1 (December 2010 to March 2011); Phase 2 (August 2011 to October 2011); and Phase 3 (September 2012). The first and third phases focused on public relations education in Australia. In the first phase, I interviewed educators and practitioners who played a role in establishing or developing Australian public relations education. In the third phase, I interviewed educators. Gender emerged as a significant theme in Phase 1 and informed participant selection in Phase 2, when I interviewed high-profile female practitioners about their experiences in the public relations industry; university public relations education emerged as a significant theme. I conducted all interviews, other than the first Phase 2 interview, which I conducted jointly with Amanda Third. Five of the six Phase 2 participants held PRIA offices at state and national levels and played various roles in relation to university education. As I noted earlier in this chapter, the findings from this phase relating specifically to gender and professionalisation have been reported elsewhere (see Fitch & Third, 2014); I focus on the Phase 2 data relating to public relations education
in this thesis. In addition, a Phase 2 participant, Anderson, offered me access to the Anderson archives in November 2011, which I analysed prior to the Phase 3 interviews in 2012. For the third phase of interviews, I identified individual educators from my analysis of these archives. This choice was deliberate, in that it did not rely on referral from participants who are still actively involved in the Australian public relations industry and the PRIA, and resulted in alternative perspectives on public relations education in earlier decades.

I used a snowball sampling technique to identify interview participants in Phases 1 and 2. Snowball sampling is a biased, non-random sampling technique, which refers participants from within a social network; early participants therefore act as gatekeepers and do not refer participants from outside the network (Browne, 2005). As a result of snowball sampling, the majority of participants held senior roles in the PRIA. Participants include four former national PRIA presidents, and all but one participant has served on a PRIA state- or national-level council or committee. PRIA membership was not a requirement for participation, but the use of snowball sampling resulted in referrals within a professional network of senior PRIA members. The final three participants were identified through analysis of the Anderson archives. The only participant who is not or was not a PRIA member is Peter Putnis, a Professor of Communication Studies, who was identified through archival research and interviewed on the basis of his involvement with the NEC in the development of a public relations course in the first accreditation round.

Participants contributed to public relations education in different ways. Interview participants include: members of the PRIA’s NEC in the 1990s; members of PRIA state councils who worked closely with individual universities in developing public relations
courses; practitioners who taught part-time in universities and educators; course directors; and school deans who established public relations courses in their institutions. All but two educators had been practitioners. Some practitioners also taught in universities (as occasional guest lecturers, casual tutors, contract lecturers, or even adjunct professors); wrote textbook chapters; served on university or state-based education committees or on national committees for the PRIA; or enrolled in postgraduate studies. Other participants, as representatives of PRIA state councils, played a significant role in establishing public relations courses in higher education. Similarly, educators often had multiple roles. Some continued to consult and/or served on PRIA state and national committees and boards, while a small number of participants pursued a more traditional academic career, focusing on scholarship and completing a PhD. Some educators left higher education for industry, with two participants returning to higher education in a later decade.

Interviews were semi-structured. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or on the telephone through the university radio studio. Interviews lasted approximately ninety minutes. I asked participants about their perceptions and experiences regarding events which occurred two, three, and even four decades prior to the interviews. It is not surprising participants struggled to remember precise dates and timelines. Participants acknowledged the fallibility of their memories in relation to dates, names, and even the sequence of events. I therefore crosschecked dates provided by participants with curriculum vitae, PRIA archives, PRIA newsletters, and secondary sources. Several participants forwarded additional information subsequent to the interview, including industry reports, newspaper cuttings, curriculum vitae, and newsletters. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service. The transcripts were then
checked for accuracy and forwarded to participants for review. Participants were invited to amend the transcripts; eight participants chose to amend the transcripts, primarily with minor changes to improve accuracy, through the insertion of names and specific information, or clarity through the amendment of the colloquial, spoken language. I developed a two-page summary of the emerging themes following my initial analysis of the transcripts and forwarded this summary to participants as a member-check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or respondent validation (Silverman, 2013), inviting further comment. Only a few participants responded with brief comments confirming the accuracy, and one participant suggested I interview David Potts. The broad themes were initially grouped in categories of: education and professionalisation, public relations education, and education in the academy. This summary of emerging themes is included in the feedback provided to participants (see Appendices D and E).

**Challenges in interview research.** Given I have acknowledged earlier in this chapter some challenges in the use of interviews as a research method, in this section I reflect on how some of these factors apply to the research reported in this thesis. I develop the discussion regarding the way interview participants offer “actively structured narratives” (Silverman, 2010, p. 45) and incorporate reflections around my subjectivity as a researcher in developing a narrative of my own. I discuss first the significance of elite participants for interview research. I then consider the impact of snowballing in participant recruitment. I offer four examples where I reflect on the significance for the findings reported in this thesis and draw on my analysis of the interview transcripts. I discuss in detail extracts from the transcript from the first participant in this study, David Potts, as I think they illustrate some important challenges of interview research and the ways in which
they influenced this study. This discussion is not designed to undermine Potts’ achievements but to illustrate the implications for the narratives participants constructed, and in doing so, framed their understanding of public relations education in particular ways.

The key informants are successful educators and practitioners; the use of snowballing sampling to identify participants in Phase 1 and 2 meant I was referred to prominent individuals, all of whom held senior roles in the PRIA at state or national level. I did not interview people who were unsuccessful or who left the industry. I therefore describe my key informants as elite interview participants. The definition of an elite interview participant is not precise, but it can be used to refer to anyone who is an expert in their field (Leech, 2002) and “hold[s] social networks, social capital and strategic positions within social structures because they are better able to exert influence” (Harvey, 2011, p. 433). Tansey argues the need for purposive, non-random sampling when researching “well defined and specific events and processes”; that is, the researcher needs to identify “the key political actors that have had most involvement with the processes of interest” (2007, p. 2).

However, elite interviews differ from other interviews for a number of reasons. They can be used to confirm information from other sources; to obtain new information, particularly in relation to the values and beliefs of a set of people; and to help reconstruct events, particularly by gaining insights into processes and deliberations, which may not be readily obtained from primary sources and archival documents (Tansey, 2007). Typically elite interview participants present their account and the data they perceive as relevant (Kezar, 2003); may be prone to exaggerating their role and influence on historical events (Berry, 2002); and control access to information (Mikecz, 2012). Their accounts may nevertheless
offer valuable information, but the researcher should be wary of simply accepting this information at face value; instead the researcher should seek to understand the significance of the narrative accounts and the retrospective ordering of experiences and information. Although these challenges may be true of all interview participants, they are exaggerated with elite participants. I offer four examples of the ways in which I think the elite status and intersecting professional networks of participants impacted on the research findings. I also acknowledge the impact of my subjectivity.

Firstly, returning to the first phase interviews after writing a book chapter on gender and public relations (see Fitch & Third, 2014), I approached these transcripts though a theoretical lens concerned with gender. On re-reading the transcripts, I was struck by the jokey banter of some male participants. These transcripts offered evidence of highly gendered and closely linked intersecting professional networks in the Australian public relations industry identified by Phase 2 participants. For example, B. Mackey recalls practising public relations as a former journalist, when it was all about “publicity” and “the free ink thing … I could ring up … the editor of the [newspaper] and [he’d say] ‘send it over’… the results were fabulous because we knew everybody.” Smith described how he, Potts, and John Bulbeck, a lecturer at NSW Sydney Institute of Technology in the 1970s, were all journalists in Perth, WA, at the same time. In his interview, Potts recalled helping appoint Bulbeck to a lecturing position the NSW Institute of Technology in 1974. These links confirm the existence of the intersecting networks of senior practitioners identified by L’Etang (2004), and indeed of former journalists, in the interviews with senior PRIA members. They also confirm the gendering of public relations, and the impact of former journalists as senior PRIA members on that gendering, identified in Fitch and Third (2014).
This example also illustrates how the researcher’s subjectivity contributes to particular interpretations.

Second, I use extracts from my interview with Potts to illustrate how elite participants understand the development of public relations, their role in this development, and the implications for the narrative they construct. Potts recalls his longstanding involvement with the public relations industry and with public relations education, from joining Eric White Associates, “the leading public relations company” in 1961; “design[ing] … courses in public relations” at Mitchell College of Advanced Education “around 1970”; editing “the first real Australian PR book”; helping “appoint the first PR lecturer at the Sydney Institute of Technology” and in response to concerns “people could enter the profession and join PRIA without any qualifications … rais[ing] the bar in terms of the quality of practice and the knowledge and so on.” Indeed, Potts’ understanding of the development of public relations, a development of which he has arguably been at the centre, confirms an ongoing tension between “where we started from—an outgrowth of publicity” and “true public relations—the two-way process of communication and influencing the way in which organisations behave.” What is interesting about Potts’, and indeed most participants’ perceptions of both their experiences and the development of Australian public relations, is the profound influence of normative, two-way symmetrical approaches to understanding public relations, confirming Byrne’s (2007) findings. Participants perceive the history of public relations in Australia as a steady and progressive development towards an ethical profession and a strategic management activity.

Third, on reading the transcript of Potts’ interview, I am struck by how similar his account is to other published material, such as a speech he gave to the PRIA College of
Fellows (Potts, 2008), an interview reported in Starck’s (1999) thesis, and an interview published in Morath (2008). I offer here some specific examples, relating to Potts’ experience of developing the communications course at Mitchell College:

- *I based the course on my expectations as an employer ... what I would want people to be able to do immediately when they came out.* (Potts, as cited in Starck, 1999, p. 37)

- I set my benchmark around what I would expect someone to be able to perform if they worked for me in practice. (Potts, 2008, p. 3)

- There was no model in Australia for it so I based it on what I would expect a potential employee to be able to do. (Potts, as cited in Morath, 2008, p. 52)

- I very much drew on my experience in the workplace … I used to complain as an employer that I couldn’t get people who were qualified. (Potts, 2010, interview transcript)

The similarity in Potts’ various accounts confirms L’Etang’s (2008b) remarks on the challenges of interviewing communication professionals; certainly, Potts stayed “on message,” to use a public relations term. I am not suggesting these memories are “wrong” but rather that researchers need to adopt a critical approach to interviews with elite participants and recognise the significance of what the participant perceives as relevant (Kezar, 2003). Potts had a clear and indeed fixed understanding of the history of public relations education in Australia and his role in its development. It is widely recognised in psychological literature that the retelling of stories leads to “stereotyped and stable memories,” that is, the stories stabilise and are even frozen in time (Redman, 2010, p. 189). Rather than revealing unique insights, Potts therefore shared in the interview a familiar
narrative, which he had himself created. I should acknowledge that I found similar instances occurring with other participants, where I could access published accounts of their experiences. For example, the transcript of Kevin Smith’s interview offers very similar information and wording to both the profile provided by the author and another produced for the occasion of a testimonial lunch where Smith was awarded a PRIA Life Fellowship (PRIA, 2007).

Finally, Potts’ experiences differ from other participants, because of his “pioneer” status and his significant involvement in establishing greater regulation of public relations activity through the professional association. I therefore consider in this section the impact on this study of Potts as the first participant, and note that other participants frequently referred to Potts in discussions around the themes of education and professionalisation. Given the dominance of Potts’ perspective – reproduced in PRIA histories, textbooks, and in the recollections of others – it is worth reflecting on the significance for the findings reported in this research. Potts was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2012 for his service to the public relations profession; his contributions span more than fifty years (PRIA, 2012b). According to the citation for this award, Potts taught at Mitchell College in the 1970s and 1980s; Ku-ring-gai College of Advanced Education (1988–1989); and CSU (1997–2004) and was instrumental in establishing many PRIA strategies aimed at raising the professional standing of the field (PRIA, 2012b). Potts was the PRIA’s National Examiner for both practitioner accreditation examinations (introduced in 1986) and later, senior professional assessments, introduced in 1990 (“Oral Examination,” 1990).

In the context of discussions about the public relations industry, its professional status, and education, six of the fourteen participants referred to Potts unprompted,
informing me “David Potts would know a lot about it … he used to do the examinations” (Smith); “you should talk to David Potts, because he would have a lot better memory in all this than I would” (Tymson); “As state president … I brought David Potts in for education” (Anderson); “[Potts] became our first professor and at that time he ran the only course in Australia,” and they chose textbooks for the courses they taught “because I knew David Potts had used that as well as his own textbook” (Smith). B. Mackey described the significant role played by Potts in establishing professional structures in the industry, through the development of public relations education and more rigorous membership criteria including practitioners’ examinations: “But Pottsie was a god, he really worked at it and he probably knew more about it at the start than anybody else and was more deeply committed.” Another participant described Potts’ role in the introduction of stricter membership criteria and raising professional standards as “absolutely critical” (Participant 10). Smith even responded to the summary feedback by asking if I had interviewed David Potts for this study. Potts was the reference point for public relations education and for the professional status of the industry for these participants. It is important to note that this referencing of Potts highlights his achievements within the PRIA, and also the pivotal role Potts played in participants’ socially constructed representations of the past. That is, the historical development of public relations in Australia is largely a narrative of Potts’ work. This observation may be in part an effect of Potts being the first participant in this study, and the use of snowball sampling led to referral within a social network where subsequent participants are likely to confirm the achievements of the referring participants (Browne, 2005). However, it also points to the dominance of the narrative created by Potts. The extensive involvement of Potts in the development of Australian public relations, through
the PRIA and through higher education, is well documented. The significance is that Potts’ narrative constrains the narratives provided by other participants, who are likely to accept and/or adopt Potts’ understanding of the development of public relations in Australia and indeed reconstruct their memories through Potts’ lens, effectively shutting down alternative perspectives and understandings.²

Analysing Interview Transcripts and Archives

I approached the archival and interview data using a thematic and textual analysis that allowed me to focus on meaning generation (Kvale, 2007). I read the archives and transcripts and coded initially through the identification of key words. I coded the interview transcripts and the file relating to each accreditation round (that is, 1991–1996 and 1997–2001) separately, initially treating them as different data sets in order to identify key themes. However, each round of coding was to some extent informed by the analysis and theoretical reading I had already done. I therefore outline in this discussion at which stages I conducted the data collection and analysis. Following the initial identification of key words and themes, I then reread the archives and transcripts, looking for patterns and themes that I could cluster into broader categories (Kvale, 2007). This process of data collection and analysis was not sequential but, as in most qualitative studies, iterative, in that meaning-making and interpretation occurred in “a continuous cycle of data collection–

² For example, one industry commentator demonstrates the pervasiveness of this narrative. Dennis Rutzou (2012) offers in his blog an “eyewitness account,” stating that 2012 was the 40th anniversary of public relations education in Australia:

The year was 1972 and I remember it well as I was a young, and probably brash, President of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (Victoria). There were many discussions about the need for graduates to work within the industry and learn how it all works rather than be captives of academia … David Potts was the driving force as the first Senior Lecturer in PR Studies at the then Mitchell College, Bathurst and we were also guided by his experiences from his time at San Jose University in California.

In fact, Potts did not visit an American university until much later and, as I established in Chapter 2, the Mitchell College course started in 1971.
analysis–interpretation–data collection” (Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p. 316). After initial identification of emerging themes, I re-examined the archives and interview transcripts to determine the appropriateness of the themes and to identify emerging broader patterns and categories. I cross-checked dates and information with secondary and other archival sources.

The first two phases of interviews were complete before I accessed the Anderson archives. I read and identified key words in the transcripts from the first two phases of interviews in 2011 and developed a series of memos to explore and develop emerging themes (Charmaz, 2000; Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Memo-writing begins the process of “linking analytic interpretation with empirical reality” by allowing the researcher to “elaborate processes, assumptions, and actions that are subsumed under our codes” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 517). The process of writing and reflecting therefore becomes part of the analytical process. I then began a detailed analysis of the Anderson archives in late 2011, again using memos to explore emerging themes. From this analysis, I identified three further educators to interview in September 2012 (Phase 3). In November 2012, I visited the Mitchell Library in Sydney and accessed PRIA (National) and PRIA (NSW) archives. I was only able to spend two days in the Mitchell Library and gained permission from the PRIA and the Mitchell Library to copy documents. I copied documents using an iPad. I focused specifically on board minutes and reports, and newsletters relating to the late 1980s through to the mid-1990s, copying anything I could find regarding university education in these years in order to analyse these documents on my return to Perth. The following month, December 2012, I gained access to the PRIA (WA) archives. I borrowed a set of PRIA (WA) and PRIA (National) newsletters and copied PRIA (WA) board
documents, correspondence and reports (again using an iPad) that were relevant to university education. I used information in the PRIA (National), PRIA (NSW), and PRIA (WA) archives to help construct a coherent narrative out of the findings emerging from my analyses of the Anderson archives and the interview transcripts. The narrative I construct therefore incorporates secondary sources and research into PRIA state and national archives to validate emergent findings.

The interviews and archives generated a large volume of data but my analysis focuses specifically on public relations education. Silverman advises limiting data sets in order to allow the analysis to be both “detailed” and “effective” (2000, p. 828). According to Miles and Huberman, the process of reducing data in qualitative research is ongoing throughout the project:

Even before the data are actually collected … anticipatory data reduction is occurring as the researcher decides (often without full awareness) which conceptual framework, which cases, which research questions, and which data collection approaches to choose. As data collection proceeds, further episodes of data reduction occur (writing summaries, coding, teasing out themes, making clusters, making partitions, writing memos). The data reduction/transforming process continues after fieldwork, until a final report is completed. (1994, p. 10).

To some extent, my analytical approach can be described as *bricolage* (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I developed a narrative by reading and re-reading the data, coding for key-words, seeking patterns and narratives in order to bring meanings and structures to the resulting narratives, and searching for intersections of meaning (Kvale, 2007). The researcher as *bricoleur* produces “a pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to
the specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 4). In this way, I began “building a logical chain of evidence” and developing “conceptual/ theoretical coherence” through the narrative I construct (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 260–261). That narrative is ever-emerging and changing in response to new information and new interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

In my analysis, I draw on themes and sub-themes to determine the PRIA’s priorities and expectations of public relations education. These themes broadly relate to the relationship between education and professionalisation and the constitution of public relations knowledge. I also combine primary and secondary sources to construct an historical narrative of Australian public relations education. I cross-check dates and information offered in interviews with secondary sources and other archives, such as PRIA national and state newsletters, board minutes and annual reports as well as contemporaneous newspaper articles. I provide a narrative account of the development of public relations education in Australia but avoid reducing the findings to a linear, evolutionary, or progressive narrative. I combine analysis of interviews with archival research in the discussion, offering a thematic analysis within an in-depth, analytical narrative in Chapter 7 to convey the complex shifts and challenges to the emergence and subsequent development of public relations as a course of study in higher education and its institutionalisation in the academy.

**Reliability and validity.** Given the subjectivity of qualitative research, reliability and validity are contested concepts, in part because they relate more easily to positivist paradigms (Daymon & Holloway, 2011; Kvale, 2007; Silverman, 2011, 2013). Daymon and Holloway (2011), for instance, point to the difficulty in establishing reliability when
results are not reproducible or consistent. However, they link validity with Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) concept of trustworthiness and argue validity can be established in qualitative research through internal validity (such as member checking) and external validity (such as linking the findings with theoretical literature) (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). In contrast, Silverman (2011) and Kvale (2007) suggest that both reliability and validity can apply to qualitative research. I seek to validate the research reported in this thesis through method triangulation, member checks, and reflexivity around my role as a researcher. I first discuss reliability and validity in order to clarify my approach.

As Daymon and Holloway (2011) noted, reliability usually refers to consistency in results. Silverman argues that reliability in qualitative research can be achieved in two ways: “by making the research process transparent through describing our work in a sufficiently detailed manner” and “paying attention to ‘theoretical transparency’ by making explicit the theoretical stance from which the interpretation takes place and showing how this produces particular interpretations and excludes others” (2011, p. 360). I therefore offer a comprehensive narrative of the research stages in this chapter and foreground my epistemological orientations and consider how this orientation influenced the research design and analysis. I include evidence in the appendices to support my account of the research process, including summary feedback for participants and an interview schedule.

Validity relates to truth and/or trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is in part a judgment confirming how data and analysis are linked to their sources and meet the original aims (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Similarly, Kvale argues that “a valid argument is sound, well-grounded, justifiable, strong and convincing” and validity in qualitative research therefore relates to “whether a method investigates what it purports to investigate”
The narrative the researcher constructs, then, needs to articulate how the research questions, the data collection, and the analysis are logically linked and include a degree of self-reflexivity around the research process. A theoretical and epistemological understanding is therefore implicit in questions of validity.

In selecting two methods of data collection – archival research and interview research – I use method triangulation, to improve the trustworthiness of my findings. Denzin (1989) argues using archives and interview data can compensate for the limitations of each. Flick (2009) argues triangulation offers an alternative to validity as it is unlikely to lead to convergence in findings from each method. Triangulation can offer additional insights, therefore potentially broadening, deepening, and strengthening research findings (Denzin, 1989; Flick, 2009). For example, in this research, analysis of the Anderson archives revealed changing procedural issues and criteria that informed the assessment of university submissions for industry accreditation in the 1990s. In contrast, interview participants offered various, albeit retrospective, understandings of university education, its significance, and their role. Each method, therefore, produces different data around public relations education in Australia in the 1990s. Background research through other PRIA archives and secondary sources allowed me to situate participant narratives and the findings that emerged from analysis of the Anderson archives within historical contexts. Thomson (2012) argues this background research is an important kind of triangulation in historical research and it echoes Daymon and Holloway’s (2011) understanding of the conferring of external validity through linking research findings with theoretical literature.

Member checking or respondent validation is used to check that the researcher’s interpretation accurately reflects participants’ socially constructed reality (Lincoln & Guba,
1985). Daymon and Holloway (2011) argue member checking improves trustworthiness in that it offers participants the opportunity to make corrections or clarifications and to confirm the researcher’s interpretation through feedback. However, Silverman (2013) and Flick (2009) argue member checks can be a problematic means of validating research as confirming that the researcher’s interpretation represents participants’ understanding of their social reality is not the same as validating research findings; indeed participants may not agree with the findings. Sharing emerging findings with participants does, however, offer the opportunity for gathering more data (Silverman, 2013). I invited participants to review and, if necessary, amend their interview transcriptions. Eight participants chose to make amendments. Following analysis of all 14 interviews, I prepared a two-page summary of emerging themes relating to education for participants in Phase 1 and 3 (see Appendix D) and a three-page summary for participants in Phase 2 (see Appendix E). I emailed participants thanking them for their participation and attached the summary, inviting further comments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). No participant chose to offer additional information or feedback on the summary.

Another way of improving trustworthiness is for the qualitative researcher to be reflexive about their role and assumptions (Daymon & Holloway, 2011), and by reporting how their “personal beliefs, values, and biases … may shape their inquiry” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). I have attempted to foreground my subjectivity as a researcher in this chapter. I identified myself as a PRIA member and public relations educator, and therefore as an “insider” to the field of study. I pointed out that it was this association that led to the research reported in this thesis. I offered examples of how my epistemological orientation informed my interpretation in the previous section. Through memoing, I reflected on
various stages of my research as I explored emerging themes, attempted to link these themes to the literature, and investigate how they changed particular assumptions and taken-for-granted knowledge. In addition, I have sought to be transparent about the choices I have made in the research design, to offer the rationale for particular choices, and to discuss the implications for the findings reported in this thesis.

**Limitations**

I present in this thesis an historical narrative of Australian public relations education in the context of the industry’s professionalisation. However, there are a number of limitations to this study. I focus, for instance, on the development of public relations education in one period; this choice was partly serendipitous in that I gained access to previously unstudied archives, the Anderson archives, relating to the 1990s. These, along with practitioner and educator interviews, therefore became the focus of my research, as they offered unique insights into internal PRIA processes and priorities in this period of expansion and growth in Australian public relations education.

As, I stated earlier in this chapter, access to PRIA archives was not straightforward and apart from the Anderson archives, came relatively late in the project. Geographical, financial, and time constraints meant that I could not spend more time in, or make additional visits to the Mitchell Library in Sydney – a five hour flight from Perth – in order to study the unsorted and uncatalogued PRIA (National) and PRIA (NSW) archives in more depth. I therefore use these archives as a resource to ground my emerging findings in particular social and historical contexts and as additional evidence with which to verify my emerging findings. However, I acknowledge that all archival studies are incomplete and ongoing (Hill, 1993). Once catalogued, the PRIA archives in the Mitchell Library will be
extremely valuable for public relations historians. There may be additional PRIA state
council archives in other states, but, again, time, financial, and geographical constraints
meant I was not able to investigate the existence of, and access to, such archives. The
accessibility of the PRIA (WA) archives meant they became a valuable resource in my
interpretation and analysis of both the Anderson archives and the interview transcripts. In
particular, the PRIA newsletters in this state archive allowed me to verify particular dates
and events and other information I accessed through the interviews. I acknowledge that my
focus on analysis of the Anderson archives in the research reported in this thesis means I
approach these archives differently from other PRIA archives.

I acknowledge limitations in the use of snowball sampling, as a biased sampling
technique, and the significance of elite interviews, where participants are part of a social
network and likely to place themselves at the centre of historical events. However,
snowballing sampling is useful in that it allowed participants to refer me to participants
within their social network, that is, the PRIA. Interview participants in Phases 1 and 2 of
this study, precisely because of their prominent roles in the Australian public relations
industry, can be thought of as “elite” participants, that is, as participants who perceive their
experiences and activities as pivotal to particular historical events, in this case, to the
development of public relations as a profession in Australia. Nevertheless, their
retrospective narratives of their involvement and of their understandings of public relations
education, along with those of Phase 3 participants (one of whom was an active participant
in PRIA state and national committees in the early 1990s), offer useful and potentially rich
insights for this study (Tansey, 2007). Representativeness and saturation do not usually
apply to elite interviews or historical studies and I sought instead diverse understandings of
public relations education and participants’ perceptions of their role in its development through the narratives they constructed.

Participants were offered the option of anonymity; four participants chose not to be identified. It is worth noting that the four participants who chose not to be identified were women. Three of these participants were Phase 2 participants, and it may be that the initial theme of that research – exploring the impact of gender on public relations – may have contributed to their request for anonymity. These participants offered frank information knowing that they would not be identified in relation to their comments. From a historical perspective, not being able to identify participants may weaken the strength of the data; however, this perspective needs to be balanced with the possibility that more useful information was gained by offering participants anonymity. Ten participants chose to be identified and ethics approval was granted by my university ethics committee on the understanding that participants may choose to have their contributions to public relations recognised through this study.

In my analysis of the Anderson archives, I chose not to identify individual academics or universities as my focus is PRIA processes and the interaction between the PRIA and universities. I also avoid identifying state presidents and state council members, in relation to accreditation discussions, in order to maintain anonymity for the education institutions. Anderson’s permission to use these archives was granted on this basis. In part, this decision protected both individual academics and academic institutions in that I could discuss particulars of failed submissions and focus on general processes and interactions. I was acutely aware that many of the educators whose correspondence is in the archives are still working in the academic sector. However this decision did mean that I could not, for
instance, compare individual PRIA state committees and review panel responses, as this may have identified particular individuals or institutions. I identify national presidents and NEC members as this information is readily available.
Chapter 4: PRIA’s Accreditation of University Courses (1992–1996)

Introduction

As I established in Chapter 2, the introduction of public relations to higher education in Australia needs to be understood in relation to broader societal changes around higher education. These changes also led to greater involvement of industry bodies in tertiary education. In this chapter, I explore interactions between the PRIA and higher education institutions in Australia in the early 1990s as the professional association sought greater involvement in the education of public relations practitioners. I analyse the personal archives of the PRIA’s NEC chair, the Anderson archives, in relation to the national industry accreditation of public relations courses. The analysis reveals how the professional association attempted to regulate, and understood the role of, public relations education. The analysis also reveals considerable tension between the NEC, universities, and some PRIA state councils over responsibility for, and the breadth and content of, public relations education.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate how the PRIA sought to regulate the transmission of public relations knowledge in the early 1990s through the introduction of a national accreditation program. The chapter is structured in nine sections. I begin by discussing the role of the PRIA in education: its attempt to regulate education and training of public relations practitioners in the early 1990s; the constitution of the NEC; the accreditation guidelines introduced in 1991; and, finally, the significance of the Anderson archives for this research. I then analyse the archival documents pertaining to the first accreditation round (1992–1996). A number of themes emerge from the analysis, offering unique insights into the interaction between industry and the academy and the constitution
of public relations knowledge in Australia in the early 1990s. I structure the discussion around these themes: state-national tensions within the PRIA; qualifications for public relations educators; industry expectations of tertiary public relations courses; and the public relations curriculum. Finally I consider the implications of these findings for Australian public relations education.

The PRIA and University Education

Industry regulation of education. The PRIA aimed to standardise industry accreditation of university public relations courses as part of a broader professionalisation drive. The introduction of a national accreditation program by the industry body in 1991, when previously universities had gained accreditation through PRIA state councils with subsequent endorsement by the national council, attempted to standardise industry expectations across Australia of what a university public relations course should offer. The analysis of the Anderson archives therefore offers important insights into how the PRIA attempted to regulate public relations education. In addition, this analysis reveals how the professional association understood the role of public relations education and the public relations curriculum. This analysis therefore offers insights into the ways in which the professional association constituted public relations knowledge. Resistance by some stakeholders, including PRIA state councils and universities, to the new accreditation process can be understood as a contest over the constitution of public relations knowledge and expertise.

Until 1991, the PRIA did not adopt a systematic approach to the regulation of public relations education. PRIA accreditation of university courses did exist prior to this time, but there is little information on how courses were approved. PRIA state councils had
considerable control over the endorsement or “accreditation” of university courses, but the criteria varied between states. One state council, for instance, announced in 1984 that a course, developed in conjunction with PRIA state council members, was approved by the PRIA state council and subsequently received national council endorsement (“National Council Accredits,” 1984; “WAIT Course Ready,” 1984; “WAIT Degree Course,” 1985). Given the state council involvement in the course development, it might be surprising if the state council did not offer approval. Elsewhere, a different PRIA state council “signed a legal agreement with [university] providing them with exclusive endorsement for two years.” In response, David Russell, the inaugural NEC chair, wrote to the state president regarding the state council’s exclusive endorsement, highlighting the need for “uniform national standards” in public relations education and in “virtually every field of PRIA activity”; expressing concern over the lack of consultation with the NEC; and pointing out that another institution in the same state already offered an accredited course and was keen to introduce short courses. Starck’s (1999) investigation of the accreditation of public relations courses offers one insight into why the industry, through the professional association, identified the need for greater regulation of public relations courses. Starck cites Potts on the transition of Mitchell College into a university:

> When we changed to (become) a university, that led to a lessening of the value of the old [industry] advisory council. Those committees were very important to the colleges of advanced education, and a lot of people argue that those places should have stayed the way they were because they taught applied studies. They say that

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when they (the CAEs) became universities, the academic side got out of hand.

(Potts, as cited in Starck, 1999, p. 39)

From Potts’ perspective, the Dawkins’ 1987 higher education reforms resulted in a greater focus on scholarship in the newly established universities and the universities became less reliant on the industry advisory committees in terms of course development. Presumably, these concerns contributed to the PRIA’s desire to standardise the industry accreditation of public relations education, with Potts at the forefront of this development. As I discussed in Chapter 2, in 1989 the PRIA national council commissioned Potts, who was then working as a consultant in Sydney and teaching at Ku-Ring-gai College, and Jan Quarles, an American academic who was teaching at RMIT in Melbourne, to conduct a benchmark investigation into public relations education in Australia. The report, *Public relations education in Australia* (Quarles & Potts, 1990), investigated fourteen university courses with a public relations component and developed accreditation criteria adapted from the PRSA guidelines. In introducing national accreditation of university courses in 1991, the PRIA aimed to standardise industry accreditation of university courses as part of a broader professionalisation drive, noting “accreditation … is an important milestone in the development of a vocation into a profession” and justifying the need for “a properly constituted, controlled and industry-supported education system” (PRIA, 1991, p. 2).

**The PRIA’s national education committee.** The NEC was established by the PRIA national council in 1990. There is a reference to Potts’ membership of an earlier PRIA national education committee (1985–1991) (see PRIA, 2012b) but the evidence in the Anderson archives confirms the NEC was a newly formed committee in 1990. Russell outlined the NEC tasks: developing university accreditation guidelines; updating reading
lists for practitioner examinations; establishing guidelines for both student internships and continuing professional education requirements; and determining criteria for educator qualifications. The NEC therefore sought to establish PRIA’s jurisdiction over a broad range of education, training, and professional development activities in Australia.

Inaugural NEC members included the authors of the PRIA-funded benchmark report, *Public relations education in Australia* (Quarles & Potts, 1990). Although Potts had worked extensively as an educator, in 1990 he was working as a consultant at Holt Public Relations in Sydney. Other members included educators: Lyn Maciver, a public relations lecturer at the UTS, who also consulted with Nightingale-Maciver; Gael Walker, a lecturer at UTS but at the Ku-ring-gai rather than the Broadway campus where Maciver taught; and practitioners: Susan Grigson; the inaugural chair, David Russell; and Greg Ray, the PRIA national president in an ex-officio role. By July 1991, Russell, Ray and Grigson were no longer on the NEC. Anderson, a consultant with Sydney-based Anderson Knight and the PRIA (NSW) state president, replaced Russell as the NEC chair in mid-1991. Anderson had worked with Potts developing part-time public relations courses at the APBC, and had just completed the first semester of a Postgraduate Diploma in Communication Management at UTS. Therefore, at the time of the first national accreditation round in July 1991, the NEC consisted of two practitioners (Anderson and Potts) and three educators (Quarles and Maciver had professional public relations experience and Walker, prior to teaching, had been an activist and lobbyist). Another consultant, Sheila O’Sullivan, who

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worked at Turnbull Fox Phillips in Melbourne, was invited to join the committee on September 6, 1991, making the members evenly split between practitioners and educators. It is perhaps surprising that all members of a national committee during the first phase of national accreditation lived and worked in only two cities, Sydney and Melbourne. Another practitioner, Adelaide-based Jennifer Richardson, joined the committee in the following year and participated in the assessment of only a few accreditation applications submitted in 1992.

University course accreditation was the NEC’s primary focus in 1991 and 1992. The first national accreditation round concluded in early 1992, although a small number of submissions for course accreditation were subsequently made by universities up until December 1995. Early in 1992, Anderson wrote: “the NEC is anxious to complete its accreditation process and turn its attention to other critical issues, particularly professional development and training of members.” In May 1992, the chair sought greater involvement of state-based representatives in public relations education.

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6 The NEC’s education agenda did not have universal industry support. The general manager of Turnbull Fox Phillips, a public relations consultancy, wrote to Anderson in July 1991 following a presentation on PRIA’s plans for accrediting university courses to complain on behalf of several industry representatives that “there was another agenda being driven by academic members.” The general manager offered assistance to develop public relations education. There is no record of Anderson’s response in the Anderson archives, but O’Sullivan, a Turnbull Fox Phillips consultant, was appointed to the NEC in September 1991. Anderson, M. (1991, September 6). [Letter to Sheila O’Sullivan]. Anderson Archives (File 1); Joseph, R. (1991, July 17). [Letter to Marjorie Anderson]. Anderson archives (File 1).

7 Richardson, J. (1991, December 17). [Letter to Marjorie Anderson]. Anderson archives (File 1). A similar letter was received from Gae Synnott, an educator based in WA, accepting an invitation to be the “WA link” for the NEC. However, Synnott did not participate in assessing accreditation applications in the first accreditation round.


to the PRIA national executive, state presidents, the NEC, and eight newly appointed state and territory education representatives stating that the NEC’s “next task is to develop a National program of Continuing Professional Education (CPE) for practitioners” and citing the need “to expand the National Education Committee to include all Branches to ensure … their support.”

The memorandum continues: “Although the initial task of this expanded Committee is CPE, it is strongly recommended that in States where courses have been accredited, a National Education Committee member seeks involvement with the tertiary institution(s).” The onus for ongoing industry liaison with universities offering accredited courses therefore became the remit of the local NEC representative along with the PRIA state council. All universities whose courses were accredited received a letter “strongly” recommending “that [university] maintain its links with PRIA (state council) by continuing to have Institute representation on the Faculty Advisory Committee.”

**Accreditation guidelines (1992–1996).** The NEC introduced formal accreditation criteria, “The guidelines for the accreditation of courses in public relations at Australian tertiary institutions” (PRIA, 1991), as part of the national accreditation process to ensure consistent standards in Australian public relations education. The accreditation criteria mirror the guidelines for Australian course accreditation included as recommendations in the Quarles and Potts (1990) report that, in turn, were adapted from the PRSA guidelines. I note in my discussion where statements in the official guidelines are identical to those in the report. These criteria acknowledge the previously inconsistent accreditation of public

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relations courses:

Some of these courses have been recognised, or accredited, by the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA). Others not. The criteria for accrediting courses have never been spelled out in Australia and accreditation has been given on varying sets of criteria. (PRIA, 1991, p. 1; Quarles & Potts, 1990, p. 46)

The guidelines are explicit about the role of education in the professionalisation of public relations:

Accreditation of courses preparing practitioners for careers is an important milestone in the development of a vocation into a profession. A prerequisite of a profession is that a body of knowledge exists about its practice. Public relations has assembled that body of knowledge. The means to pass it on to future generations of practitioners is through a properly constituted, controlled and industry-supported education system. (PRIA, 1991, p. 2; Quarles & Potts, 1990, p. 46)

Therefore, public relations education is concerned with the “transmission” of the “public relations body of knowledge,” the existence of which confirms the professional standing of public relations. Industry regulation of that education is therefore framed within a professional discourse, drawing on the regulation and training of public relations practitioners.

The accreditation guidelines state “no more than 25 per cent of a total course at undergraduate level should be in professional communication/public relations subjects, with the remainder of the course made up of “areas which support the professional core” (PRIA, 1991, p. 4; Quarles & Potts, 1990, p. 48). These supporting areas could include a range of established disciplines, in order to provide a broad education:
The fundamental purpose of an undergraduate public relations curriculum is to provide the student with a well-rounded program of study, including an area of specialisation called a public relations major (or organisational communication). It should be aimed at developing the intellectual and problem-solving capacities of students as well as giving a sound understanding of the theory and practice of communication and public relations. (PRIA, 1991, p. 3; Quarles & Potts, 1990, pp. 48–49)

According to the accreditation guidelines, therefore, the ideal curriculum offered both a broad education as well as expertise in public relations. As such, in this first accreditation round, the accreditation guidelines suggest university-level public relations education serves to introduce students to the “theory and practice” of public relations, and to develop their “intellectual and problem-solving” skills through a well-rounded, general education. For example, feedback to universities also related to breadth, or the support studies beyond the public relations core; one university was advised to encourage students to select subjects from “social and political; philosophy of culture; communication and technology; and textual performance” streams.  

Despite the introduction of a national accreditation program designed to standardise processes and expectations around university course accreditation, the criteria states that “accreditation should not be used to encourage similarity between courses,” but rather “diversity of course design and content [should] be encouraged” (PRIA, 1991, p. 2; Quarles & Potts, 1990, p. 47). Indeed, the NEC chair responded to one regional institution who wrote to the NEC following the rejection of their submission, accusing the NEC of a

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metropolitan bias, using the same words in the accreditation criteria:

Accreditation should recognise that each institution has its own unique situation, its own special mission, its own particular teaching resources. This uniqueness is an asset to be safeguarded. Accreditation should promote innovation, not stifle it.  
(PRIA, 1991, p. 2)  

As such, the NEC assessed applications based primarily on the content in the “professional core,” which comprised the public relations units and made up only a quarter of the degree. The criteria acknowledge that “arts and sciences remain a strong basis for helping practitioners to understand an increasingly complex world and their role in it as communicators, and for developing critical faculties” (Quarles & Potts, 1990, p. 48; PRIA, 1991, p. 3). However, the criteria also note “strong support among practitioners” for “business subjects” and for “English literature, including writing skills” (PRIA, 1991, pp. 3, 4). Indeed, Quarles and Potts recommended diverse support studies so that “students have the freedom to choose that course which most matches their career goals” (1990, p. 47). In this first accreditation round, therefore, the guidelines emphasise the value of a generalist university-level education in any discipline, alongside a professional core of public relations units.


As chair of the NEC, Anderson wrote to universities teaching public relations  

13 Anderson, M. (1992, July 15). [Letter to university]. Anderson archives (File 1). These comments draw on the accreditation criteria which state “accreditation should not be used to encourage similarities between courses” (PRIA, 1991, p. 2). The wording is primarily drawn from the Quarles & Potts (1990) report but is slightly modified.  
14 I note a small difference in the Quarles and Potts report, which states “practitioners generally view English, including writing skills, to be central to support studies” (1990, p. 48) whereas the PRIA (1991) criteria refer specifically to English literature. However, the comments regarding practitioner support for business subjects as suitable support studies are identical.
courses on July 24, 1991 inviting them to apply for accreditation by September 15.\textsuperscript{15} The NEC members met on Sunday November 2, 1991, the day after the PRIA Annual General Meeting, in Sydney to discuss the applications. The chair wrote to universities that submitted by the September deadline on December 6, 1991, to advise whether their application for PRIA accreditation had been successful, to request further information or clarification, or to reject their application. In the case of rejection, specific reasons were given. A second deadline of December 16 was offered to universities that could not meet the first, but universities could submit at any point and, as noted in the previous chapter, some submitted courses for accreditation as late as 1995.\textsuperscript{16} However, regardless of the timing of the submission, all courses – if successful – were accredited until the end of December 1996. In January 1992, there were eight accredited degrees at five institutions in four states.\textsuperscript{17} These degrees included five undergraduate qualifications (four Bachelor of Arts with majors in public relations, communication, or applied communication, and one Bachelor of Business [Public Relations]) and three postgraduate courses (two graduate diplomas in communication and communication management and a Master in Applied Science [Communication Management]). Five courses were either rejected or the university was asked to provide additional information. A memorandum detailing this information was sent to NEC members and copied to state presidents in January 1992 requesting the presidents:

pass on the relevant information to Member/s in your State who are involved with

\textsuperscript{17} Anderson, M. (1992, January 26). “PRIA accreditation of public relations courses” [Memorandum to NEC members, national executive, and state presidents]. Anderson archives (File 1).
the course advisory committees. Your assistance is sought to liaise with the institutions and keep me (NEC) informed of any developments with regard to courses referred to you for consultation.  

Therefore the state councils were responsible for ongoing liaison with universities teaching accredited courses. By November 1992, 16 public relations courses had been accredited. There was an increase in the total number of accredited courses from 1990, that is, before the introduction of national accreditation. However, there were more accredited graduate or postgraduate courses (see Appendix B for more information on the growth in accredited Australian public relations courses in the 1990s).

**State versus national.** The shift in responsibility for the accreditation of university courses from PRIA state councils to a national committee led to tension, as there were different expectations of the public relations curriculum between state and national committees. One university, with strong links with its state-based council, received a letter from the NEC confirming the need for more communication theory before accreditation could be given. Although the NEC recognised “the course offers students a very practical orientation to public relations” and the “initiatives in involving practitioners and presenting case problems,” the NEC nevertheless identified “the need to strengthen the course in the first year by the addition of more communication theory.” The particular university had existing accreditation through the PRIA state council and enlisted the council’s support to lobby the NEC. The state president wrote to the NEC chair “to voice our wholehearted

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support for the continued accreditation of the [university] undergraduate public relations course”:

I believe that [university] has provided a fine example of an educational institution meeting the requirements of a growing profession by becoming involved in the profession at the practitioner level. Senior practitioners have been closely associated with the development of the course over the years and have remained in touch both on an Institute consultancy basis and as lecturers since it started.

The original course was written by Fellows and Members of the Institute and over the years the course has continued to be developed by Fellows and Members of the Institute.21

In the same letter, the state president complains about the NEC’s “procrastination over the re-accreditation of [university]” and his “very real concern for the stability and integrity of public relations as a tertiary subject in this State with the ongoing debate over whether this course qualifies or doesn’t qualify.” Following a council meeting, the state president wrote again to the NEC chair: “members of the State Council were incredulous that accreditation had still not been granted after this length of time” and “this is the very type of issue which will undermine public relations in [state] if all official affairs are handed over to National Council under a proposed rationalisation program.”22 The state president suggests that the delay is unwarranted, given the involvement of the state council and senior practitioners in the development of the course. The state president also wrote an informal but revealing note confirming some state council members perceived: “academics responsible for

accreditation have pirated the issue and are setting it up based upon their own opinions and attitudes” and suggesting the possibility that the NEC is “simply being pedantic.”

The state council perceived a clear distinction between practitioner-driven state councils and the national education committee driven by “academic” concerns. The issue was resolved, following a telephone discussion between Quarles, as an NEC representative, and the university course coordinator confirming “the extent to which communication theory is taught,” and that “it is dispersed across subjects.”

The Bachelor of Business (Public Relations) was subsequently accredited until December 31, 1996.

The correspondence between the state council and the NEC reveals considerable tensions between their respective roles and involvement in public relations education.

Another issue emerged from the same university. The course offered by the School of Management, referred to in the previous paragraph, was not the only accredited course at the university as another school was promoting their public relations course as accredited by the PRIA. Neither the PRIA state council nor the NEC were aware of this second course, although the coordinator of the course referred to in the previous paragraph, informed Anderson on December 16, 1992:

The separate accreditation of two PR courses at [university] goes back to the early days. If I remember rightly, the Social Sciences course was accredited for five years—either from 1987 or 1988.

Since that accreditation, the School of Social Sciences has had no further

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contact with PRIA, and received no notification of the need to submit for ongoing accreditation.\textsuperscript{26}

It is worth noting that this second course is not included in the Quarles and Potts (1990) report, which lists public relations courses across Australia. The NEC chair alerted committee members to this situation:

> We have accredited the course within the School of Management at [university]. It appears a School of Social Sciences course was “accredited” some years ago by the [state] Institute (which was the system at that time) and continues to publicise its course as “accredited by the PRIA (even though its accreditation has not been updated).”\textsuperscript{27}

In response to a letter from the NEC chair, the second school made a formal submission and its course, a Bachelor of Arts (Social Sciences), was accredited by the NEC on August 15, 1993.\textsuperscript{28} This incident confirms at least one state acted autonomously in the accreditation of university courses prior to the introduction of a national university course accreditation program in 1991.

**Academic staff.** Another concern for the NEC was the seniority and professional experience of academic staff running public relations courses. According to the accreditation criteria, the course coordinator should be “a fulltime academic” with “experience in public relations practice as well as an appropriate degree” (Quarles & Potts, 1990, p. 50; PRIA, 1991, p. 6). An emphasis on practical skills and industry-related activity

\textsuperscript{26} University. (1992, December 16) [Letter to Marjorie Anderson]. Anderson archives (File 1).

\textsuperscript{27} Anderson, M. (n.d.). [Memorandum to NEC, copied to John Malone and state presidents]. Anderson archives (File 1).

\textsuperscript{28} Anderson, M. (1993, August 15). [Letter to university, copied to state president]. Anderson archives (File 1). The full degree qualification is a Bachelor of Arts (Social Sciences) Special Purpose Program in Public Relations.
is prominent as academic staff were encouraged to “continue their professional
development—by work in practice, by consulting, by research and by participation in
professional organisations”; in addition, “engagement of part time teaching staff from
among practitioners is to be encouraged” (Quarles & Potts, 1990, p. 50; PRIA, 1991, p. 6).
In 1990, the typical educator had “experience as a practitioner and a B.A. in
communications or a related discipline” (Quarles & Potts, 1990, p. 32).

Analysis of the correspondence in the archives reveals the NEC expected the course
coordinator to hold a senior position within the academic institution, although this
requirement was not stated explicitly in the 1991 accreditation guidelines. The NEC chair
requested “further information on the academic staff for the course including
qualifications” from one university, before the NEC could consider their submission for
accreditation.29 The university replied that it was “supplementing the two Lecturing staff
… with sessional assistance in 1992” as “tight funding considerations” meant a senior
appointment for the public relations course would not be made until 1993.30 The state
president then wrote to the university, at the request of the NEC chair, stating that “the only
remaining issue [for accreditation] is whether you have staff of sufficient seniority and
numbers in the PR area.”31 The state president explained: “the PRIA in [state] has had a
series of complaints about the lack of dedicated PR staff in the [university] course over the
years, and this is the background to the National Education Committee decision to withhold
PRIA accreditation of the course.” After a meeting with the university’s industry liaison

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Australian tertiary institutions” [Letter to university]. Anderson archives (File 1).
(File 1).
Committee” [Facsimile to university]. Anderson archives (File 1).
committee, the state president reported to the NEC on April 30, 1992:

The course currently has two lecturers in PR and a part-timer with a media background. We do not consider this sufficient.

[University] told us they would appoint a person of at least senior lecturer status with a specific PR background. [University] point out that this position has been funded.

We believe that, with this appointment, the staffing will be acceptable, but we recommend that re-accreditation should not be granted until the matter has been completed.32

The university suggested possible legal issues with students if the course was not re-accredited, and the chair of the NEC confirmed on May 30, 1992 that accreditation would be maintained only until the end of 1992, and after that, would be subject to the appointment of an additional staff member at senior lecturer level or above.33 The chair of the state-based education committee sat on the selection panel to recruit a senior lecturer and on March 22, 1993 confirmed to the NEC chair that the successful candidate had both “excellent academic qualifications” and “practical experience in a range of public relations areas including community relations, media relations and government relations.”34 The next day, the course was accredited until December 1996.35

**Industry expectations.** Accreditation granted by a PRIA state council jointly to a

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university course and a technical institute course was deemed to no longer meet the national accreditation standards. In that state, the only accredited course was a combination of a Certificate in Public Relations offered by the technical institute and a Bachelor of Arts (Communication Studies) offered by the university. The combination of these two qualifications had been accredited by the PRIA state council in 1989.\textsuperscript{36} In a letter to the state president, the NEC chair requested assistance in liaising with the two education institutions with regard to their joint application for accreditation under the national program.\textsuperscript{37}

One practitioner, who was the PRIA state president in 1989 and a member of the university’s course advisory committee at that time, provided the NEC chair with an account of her “frustrating” interaction with the university:

> From the industry point of view there is little discussion or interaction (if any) prior to academic staff submitting changes to courses. In fact, in many instances it seems to be that changes take place according to university/campus resources, rather than industry/profession needs.\textsuperscript{38}

The practitioner further complained of a lack of ongoing contact between the university and the public relations industry, stating “there generally seems to be an attitude of seeking industry support for what academics want to do, rather than looking at what is needed within the industry.” The practitioner offered as an example the university’s “response to a question why a study of radio was not included in the degree, particularly in relation to its

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} University. (1991, September 10). “Accreditation of BA (Communication Studies) and TAFE Certificate in Public Relations” [Letter to Anderson]. Anderson archives (File 1).
\item \textsuperscript{37} Anderson, M. (n.d.). “Re the [state] education institutions submissions” [Facsimile cover sheet to state president]. Anderson archives (File 1).
\item \textsuperscript{38} Practitioner, (1991, October 31). “Tertiary education (courses and industry needs)” [Facsimile, two-page note]. Anderson archives (File 1).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
use in emergency situations … was that they did not have anyone to teach the subject.” It is worth noting that the study of radio was not required in the PRIA (1991) accreditation guidelines. The attitude expressed by this practitioner is that the university was failing to develop or resource the public relations course with the express aim of meeting industry expectations, that is, the expectations of the local practitioners on the state council. The NEC chair subsequently advised the university on December 6, 1991, that “accreditation is withheld pending receipt of more detailed information.”

A letter was sent on the same date to the technical institute declining accreditation on the grounds that “the Advanced Certificate course in Public Relations was not considered to be of sufficient depth and rigour to warrant accreditation.”

Presumably following discussion between the state council and the NEC, the state president wrote to the NEC chair on August 25, 1992:

It goes without saying that Council in [state] is not happy with the situation whereby in [state] we have this “patched up” Degree in Communications and [technical institute] Certificate in PR as a combined facsimile of a full Public Relations Degree Course.

Being totally frank we have talked with the University—begging them to grab the high ground as the major institution of PR learning in [state]. We understand they would like to do this, but University Council is not prepared to outlay any further funds on new course development at a time of dire need.


41 PRIA state president. (1992, August 25). “Combined [university] Communications and TAFE PR course” [Facsimile to Marjorie Anderson]. Anderson archives (File 1). An earlier version of this letter was sent to Anderson by facsimile on August 20, 1992, with a handwritten annotation: “Marjorie —please sit on this until I get one more opinion.”
This particular case is revealing. The PRIA accreditation criteria introduced in 1991 was designed for university-level courses. Although the certificate course focused on public relations, it was perceived by the PRIA state council and the NEC to lack the scholarly rigour of a university-level course. Indeed, no non-university level courses were accredited in the 1990s, following the introduction of the national program. However, the NEC and the state council agreed the university course lacked the professional communication or public relations-specific units necessary for accreditation. The NEC chair wrote to the university and the technical institute on September 2, 1992 stating that the application for accreditation for the joint offering had been declined, and that NEC members were “unanimous in deciding” the course needed to be “strengthened” by the addition of professional units. The applicants were referred to the Quarles and Potts (1990) report.

Public relations curriculum. Despite the development of written accreditation criteria, understandings of the content of a “suitable” public relations course varied between the NEC, some PRIA state councils, and universities. In one example, discussed earlier in this chapter, the PRIA state council and the university disputed the need for communication theory although the inclusion of communication theory was a key component of the professional core of public relations units prescribed in the criteria. In addition to a strong focus on communication theory, the professional units should cover historical developments in public relations; public relations theory and its relationship to communication theories; theories of organisational communication (including management theory); functional elements (goal-setting, research, program planning, message preparation, budgeting, evaluation); and management activities (Quarles & Potts, 1990; PRIA, 1991).

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One university accreditation submission was rejected by the NEC, because the university’s Bachelor of Arts degree did “not cover sufficient areas of public relations to warrant accreditation.”\(^4^3\) The NEC referred the university to the Quarles and Potts (1990) report and the committee’s concern that the public relations component of the course should be “at least 25 per cent” (although the written criteria actually states “no more than 25 %”). In response, the course coordinator, a member of the PRIA state council, requested that the NEC “provide a definitive ruling on what constitutes a public relations subject.”\(^4^4\) The course coordinator added:

> Your decision not to provide accreditation suggests that the future for public relations is for it to remain technically based rather than seeking new ways to heighten professional standing and knowledge. Until this occurs practitioners will continue to be seen as skills based para-professionals and who will never achieve true communications management and professional status. Communication policy, cross cultural communications and environmental communicative issues are just part of the wider picture for the public relations professional. Until PRIA can look beyond itself, shed its traditional ties and address issues of international importance, graduates and practitioners will have short-sighted and fatalistic career aspirations.

The NEC chair responded promptly, referring again to the significance of the PRIA-funded Quarles and Potts (1990) report for public relations education.\(^4^5\) In July 1992, Walker,

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\(^4^4\) University. (1992, January 31). “Accreditation of communications programme at [university]” [Letter to Anderson]. Anderson archives (File 1). A copy of p. 49 of the Quarles and Potts (1990) report, which prescribes the content to be covered in the profession core, is stapled to the letter in the file.

Anderson and university representatives met and discussed the course at the ACA conference.\textsuperscript{46} On January 28, 1993, the university submitted a revised Bachelor of Arts (Communication) for accreditation, following extensive industry liaison and the formation of a new university faculty, the Department of Communication.\textsuperscript{47} O'Sullivan, as a member of the NEC, confirmed to the NEC chair the next month that “the course now appears to offer a sufficiently well balanced program on both communications and public relations theory and practice as well as extending the students into a range of other academic studies.”\textsuperscript{48} On March 23, 1993 the NEC chair informed the university that its course had been accredited.\textsuperscript{49}

The internal correspondence between members of the NEC reveals their expectations of a theoretically informed public relations education in accredited courses. For example, in August 1992, Quarles outlined her responses to undergraduate and postgraduate course submissions from four universities.\textsuperscript{50} Quarles foregrounds the need for “a critical approach,” asking in relation to one course: “will they be keeping the critical and vocational aspects of the program?” and stating of another: “I would want some emphasis on critique of practice, looking to case studies examples, international communications … I worry that they are getting enough theory.” Quarles recommended accreditation of the courses at both these institutions, but rejection of a third application:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
I’m quite worried about this one and I don’t feel it meets our standards at all. Some of the aspects … look okay but I don’t think any of the aspects of public relations theory and critical views of practice and management information is [sic] given to students.\(^{51}\)

Quarles’ concern about theory points to her conviction that there was a need for a strong theoretical foundation to public relations education in universities.

Feedback offered to universities suggests the priorities and expectations of the NEC members around the public relations curriculum. Often this feedback extended to the recommendation of certain (mostly US) textbooks or requests for more focus on specific topics such as employee communication or communication theory. One university, for instance, received the following feedback:

The Committee wishes to express concerns about both the course text and list of reference materials and suggests that they be reviewed with respect to additions and updating. Members of the PRIA–NEC are available to discuss and clarify these concerns with the coordinator.\(^{52}\)

Another university was informed their “course reference materials should be reviewed with respect to additions and updating.”\(^{53}\) However, there was widespread concern within the NEC regarding the lack of resources and textbooks specific to the Australian context. These concerns were acknowledged in the Quarles and Potts report, which stated


\(^{52}\) Anderson, M. (1991, December 6). “Accreditation of courses in public relations at Australian Tertiary Institutions” [Letter to university]. Anderson archives (File 1). Multiple letters were sent to universities on this day, although each was adapted to incorporate specific feedback.

“unanimously, educators voiced a need for more Australian texts, more Australian examples from industry and the sharing of resource materials from practitioners” (1990, p. 27). According to Quarles and Potts, educators were forced to supplement Tymson and Sherman’s (1987) *The Australian Public Relations Manual* “with American texts, which in themselves are not satisfactory because of the dominance of US case examples” due to its lack of theory (1990, p. 27). The US textbooks commonly used in Australian public relations courses in 1990, as identified by Quarles and Potts (1990) following interviews with educators across Australia, included: *Managing Public Relations* (Grunig & Hunt, 1984); *Effective Public Relations* (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1985); and *Experts in Action* (Cantor & Burger, 1984).

**Implications For Australian Public Relations Education**

Emerging from the review of accreditation submissions and feedback offered to universities in the first accreditation round is a clear understanding of NEC expectations of the ideal public relations curriculum. Submissions were not successful if the NEC perceived the courses to lack communication theory, senior staff with public relations expertise, or a sufficient focus on public relations. In rejecting certain content – for example, advertising and journalism units – NEC members confirmed their understanding of public relations as distinct from other communication studies courses. However, organisational communication was considered appropriate and explicitly referred to in the accreditation guidelines. The acceptance or rejection of particular units can be understood as an attempt to define, or at least, establish the disciplinary boundaries of public relations. For the NEC in this first accreditation round, therefore, a suitable public relations course in higher education offered breadth and an interdisciplinary approach to study and included a
professional core of public relations units underpinned by communication theory. The professional core included “functional” units drawn from industry practice, such as message preparation, goal setting, and evaluation.

Complaints made by individual universities, state council members, and industry representatives reveal the contest over content, breadth, and responsibility for public relations education. My analysis reveals considerable resistance to both the institutionalisation of public relations knowledge and the involvement of the professional association and its national, rather than state-based, education committee. For instance, the rejection by the NEC of an accreditation submission for a course developed and supported by senior practitioners astounded one state council, whose members could not understand the need for “communication theory” and subsequently accused the NEC of “pirating” public relations education. Similarly, one general manager of a consultancy, writing on behalf of senior industry practitioners, accused the NEC of an academic agenda that marginalised their expertise.\(^{54}\) Another university accused the NEC of failing to develop public relations education into anything more than a technical field or para-profession. However, the evidence in the Anderson archives in relation to the first national accreditation round suggests NEC members, primarily drawing on the written accreditation guidelines, expected accredited courses to be theoretically grounded courses underpinned by communication theory and critiques of practice and three-quarters of the course should comprise non-public relations units. The contest over education points to the difficulty in combining professional practice with, and developing academic legitimacy in, a relatively new field of study.

The Anderson archives shed light on the PRIA’s constitution of public relations knowledge and reveal divergent understandings of public relations and public relations education within the PRIA and among industry practitioners. The emerging and at times contested disciplinary boundaries, for instance, can be seen in concerns about the suitability of certain subjects as part of the public relations core in industry-accredited degrees. The issue was the NEC’s demand for public relations-specific subjects rather than general media or applied communication subjects such as advertising or journalism, suggesting a disciplinary struggle over what constitutes public relations knowledge or is a “core” public relations subject. The majority of the course – the support studies outside the professional core – could be in any field. As such, the accreditation process suggested a commitment to a generalist university-level education. The NEC therefore valued a broad, generalist education in any field in raising the standards and status of public relations.

At the same time, industry experience was perceived as integral to public relations education and the transmission of public relations knowledge. Expectations that public relations educators would have professional industry experience and universities would continue to liaise closely with practitioners and PRIA members as a condition of accreditation suggest that, from the point of view of the PRIA industry, practice significantly informed and underpinned public relations knowledge. That is, universities were required to demonstrate industry involvement in both the development of courses and through ongoing industry engagement. The mandatory work experience and internships served to “socialise” students into industry practice. The PRIA’s expectations and regulation of public relations education point to the difficulty in combining professional practice and academic legitimacy in a relatively new field of study.
Conclusion

The analysis presented in this chapter offers important insights into the interaction between the public relations industry and higher education in a hitherto understudied but significant period in the institutionalisation of public relations education in Australia. The findings suggest the PRIA, through its establishment of the NEC and the introduction of a national accreditation program sought a significant role in the development and regulation of public relations education. The professional association defined its expectations of both educators’ ongoing engagement with its representatives and an appropriate public relations curriculum through accreditation.

I identified a number of insights significant to the development of Australian public relations education and the constitution of “professional knowledge” in the early 1990s. For some practitioners, the institutionalisation of public relations knowledge in the academy, while they recognised university-level education as necessary for professional status, is problematic. Therefore, the first insight relates to resistance from industry practitioners as well as some educators to the shift within the PRIA from non-standardised, state-based endorsement of university courses to a national accreditation program. In one example, senior practitioners and state council members were robust in their defence of a course they helped create, and did not see, for example, the need for communication theory. The resistance can be understood as a contest over the constitution of public relations knowledge and therefore over what should be taught in a public relations course in higher education.

The second insight is that there were diverging attitudes or positions towards public relations education within the professional association and among practitioners and
educators. There is evidence of some contestation or tension between NEC, some state council, individual practitioner, and individual university perspectives (particularly when university submissions for accreditation were not successful). I found a high degree of permeability and movement between practitioners and educators in the first half of the 1990s. Practitioners served on university advisory, state, and national education committees, taught part-time in universities, and worked closely with educators on the NEC. Educators, in turn, served on state and national councils, consulted on a part-time basis or even transitioned back into the public relations workforce. In contrast to the findings in the literature, there were not clear and consistent practitioner, educator, and professional association perspectives on public relations education emerging from this analysis.

The third insight relates to expectations regarding the role of public relations education. I identified, based on the analysis presented in this chapter, that the NEC valued a broad, general education. That is, university education was perceived as valuable in developing the “critical faculties” and analytical thinking of students. According to the written accreditation criteria, university-level education supported the professional standing of public relations. The NEC did not dictate the precise content or discipline of the non-25% professional core of public relations units, but indicated practitioners had a preference for English literature (or at least writing) and business subjects. However, the accreditation criteria specifically encouraged support studies in arts and sciences. This insight suggests that the NEC perceived the value of university education in the early 1990s in broader terms than simply the transmission of public relations knowledge, derived from and constituted in public relations practice.
The final insight concerns public relations knowledge and the disciplinary status of public relations in the academy. In 1991, the NEC expected an accredited public relations course would be theoretically informed and underpinned by communication theory and a critique of practice. Analysis of NEC correspondence with universities reveals the emerging disciplinary boundaries as advertising and journalism courses were deemed inappropriate content for the public relations “professional core”; however, courses in organisational communication, rather than specifically public relations, were acceptable.\(^{55}\) Public relations is therefore constituted by the NEC in the early 1990s as a distinct field within communication studies. It is precisely this “contest” over the emerging disciplinary boundaries, which offers rich insights into the interaction between industry and the academy, and the constitution of public relations knowledge.

This chapter has presented public relations education as a contested field for an industry seeking to regulate education to address concerns over its professional status. The findings reported in this chapter offer important insights into the interaction between the public relations industry, through the NEC, and the higher education sector in the early 1990s and the constitution of public relations knowledge at this time. As I have established in this chapter, understandings of this knowledge were contested and dynamic. In the following chapter, therefore, I consider the NEC’s second accreditation cycle (spanning the years 1997–2001) in order to compare the PRIA’s priorities for, and understandings of, tertiary public relations education, and in tandem, the ways public relations knowledge or expertise was constituted, across the decade.

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\(^{55}\) It is worth noting that the accreditation criteria state that an undergraduate public relations education should include a specialisation in either public relations or organisational communication (PRIA, 1991, p. 3).
Chapter 5: PRIA’s Accreditation of University Courses (1997–2001)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I investigated the PRIA’s introduction of a national course accreditation program managed by the PRIA’s newly established NEC in 1991. In this chapter, I analyse the Anderson archives in relation to the second accreditation round, drawing on the documents in the second file in the archives. In this round, the NEC accredited degrees in the five-year period 1997–2001. The PRIA devolved responsibility for the initial assessment of university submissions in the second round to state-based committees, comprising primarily of industry practitioners. Whereas in the first round, the PRIA, through a single national committee (the NEC), was concerned with establishing public relations courses within a broad, general university-level education, in the second round, the shift to an initial review by state-based practitioner committees led to a greater emphasis on the role of public relations education in meeting industry needs. The analysis presented in this chapter reveals the changing ways in which the professional association and practitioners understood the role of public relations education in the 1990s, their priorities for the curriculum, and the value they placed on industry experience in the constitution of public relations knowledge.

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to investigate the second round of a national accreditation process in order to understand the changing concerns, preoccupations, expectations, and priorities of the industry in relation to education and the public relations body of knowledge. The chapter is structured in three sections. I first describe public relations education in Australia in the 1990s, including its growth over the decade; compare the two NEC accreditation rounds; identify changes in the accreditation criteria; and
consider practitioner involvement in public relations education. I then present themes, which emerged from my analysis of the Anderson archives in relation to the second accreditation round. These themes include the public relations curriculum, the changing student cohort, expectations of academic staff, the disciplinary boundaries of public relations, and the significance of professional knowledge. In the final section, I consider the significance of industry perspectives on education and the impact of changes in PRIA accreditation processes between the first and second accreditation cycles.

Public Relations Education in the 1990s

**Growth in public relations education.** The 1990s was a significant decade for public relations in higher education, following growth in both the number of public relations students and in the number of undergraduate and postgraduate courses. As I discussed in Chapter 2, government policy changes (in particular, the 1987 Dawkins and 1996 Vanstone reforms) had a significant impact on the Australian higher education sector, which grew by one third in the 1990s, due to increases in both Australian and international undergraduate students (Raciti, 2010). The reduction of government funding in 1994 to just over half of university operating budgets meant universities were increasingly reliant on alternative revenue sources (Raciti, 2010). The result was a competitive marketplace where universities aimed to attract student “consumers” (Baldwin & James, 2000). The changing higher education sector – with its increasing marketisation – offered opportunities for the development of public relations courses.

As I established in Chapter 2, the proliferation of public relations courses in the 1990s mirrored the increase in communication studies courses. By the end of the second accreditation round, there were 18 undergraduate and 11 postgraduate accredited courses.
available in Australian tertiary institutions, compared to only 10 undergraduate and one postgraduate courses at the start of the decade (see Appendix B for more information). This increase in courses occurred despite only a small increase in the number of institutions offering PRIA-accredited courses (see Appendix A). The number of accredited courses in public relations more than doubled from 1990 to 2001, with more diverse degree options as universities introduced more niche and specialist qualifications. Some universities offered a suite of public relations degrees, including Bachelor, graduate or postgraduate diplomas, and Masters-level courses. Similarly, by the end of the decade, postgraduate courses in public relations included specialised Masters degrees in Communication and Business, rather than the generic Masters of Arts. As such, institutions already teaching public relations courses chose to expand the degrees on offer to suit a market-led demand for niche courses.

**Accreditation in 1992–1996 and 1997–2001.** The second file in the Anderson archives, which is the focus in this chapter, contains correspondence mostly between state-based education committees, the NEC, and universities. Unlike File 1, File 2 contains few documents which do not relate to the accreditation of university courses. Whereas in the analysis presented in the previous chapter, I could refer to various documents regarding invitations to join the NEC, and other significant education-related activities by NEC members, there is less information on the NEC’s broader activities in File 2. The formal reports by state-based accreditation committees to the NEC offer an incomplete record of the concerns of these committees and I note in my discussion where the outcomes of deliberations are unknown. I chose not to use the themes identified in the analysis of File 1 to avoid imposing pre-conceived categories on the contents of File 2. However, in my
discussion in this chapter, I compare the themes that emerged from analysis of each file to understand the shifts in priorities and concerns across the decade and their significance for my investigation into the role played by the professional association in developing Australian public relations education. I also draw on PRIA national and state archives and publications to verify some of the information in the Anderson archives and to understand some of the processes and priorities within the PRIA in relation to accreditation and education.

The PRIA produced a strategic plan in 1995, positioning itself as “the peak organisation for communication professionals in Australia” and confirming the significance of education for the industry’s professional standing.\(^1\) Indeed, the NEC was designated with a number of tasks to “ensure the appropriateness of tertiary education courses in Australia,” including sourcing “government funding for a major research project to review accreditation guidelines,” as well as a review of accreditation criteria and processes, management of the next accreditation round, and, finally, the initiation of “negotiations with tertiary institutions regarding the need for additional courses.”\(^2\) In 1997, following a comprehensive report by Anderson to the national board on the status of the second accreditation round, the board “resolved that the NEC should make decisions on tertiary course accreditation without further reference to the Board.”\(^3\) Until then, the NEC reported

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\(^2\) NEC. (1995, June 16). \textit{PRIA National Education Committee Minutes}. Anderson archives (File 2). The PRIA national secretary/treasurer and the PRIA strategic plan coordinator attended the NEC meeting to discuss the NEC’s role “to grow and develop the public relations profession through education—both university courses and CPE related activities.”

The accreditation criteria produced by the PRIA for the second round was an edited and updated version of the 1991 criteria. Large sections remained unchanged, or underwent only minor editorial changes, and I note in my discussion where I quote identical sections. The later guidelines note in the preamble that they were “updated in October 1996, and approved by the National Board of the Institute” (PRIA, 1996, p. 1). The following statement is an addition to the 1991 criteria, titled “Sets minimum standards”:

A guiding philosophy is that education for public relations practice must achieve two things: first, the development of intellectual faculties and strategic, analytical and problem-solving, or “advisory” resources to be put to use as the graduate moves through his/her career, and: second, the necessary technical skills to enable graduates to adequately perform their initial jobs. (PRIA, 1996, p. 2)

A distinction is therefore made regarding the role of public relations education. First, university education should develop in students a capacity for critical thinking and problem-solving skills to assist with students’ future career development. Second, technical – rather than strategic – skills should be taught to assist graduates in their first jobs. A significant addition later in the document refers to the need for graduates to complete “two years’ fulltime practice, [before they] are eligible for entry to professional levels of membership of the Institute” (PRIA, 1996, p. 5). As such, it confirms the need for graduates of PRIA-accredited courses to serve an “apprenticeship” before they meet the requirements for full institute membership. This requirement highlights the industry perspective that tertiary education alone was not sufficient preparation for professional-grade membership of the PRIA.
Other significant changes include the addition of a section on “graduate courses,” which notes the diversity of coursework and research courses available at postgraduate level and therefore the difficulty in specifying accreditation criteria for postgraduate, and in particular, research degrees. The criteria note the significance of research and “a grounding in research methodology” for studies at this level (PRIA, 1996, p. 4). In other sections, the updated criteria offer additional information in relation to suitable support studies, expectations regarding the education level of course coordinators, and the need for additional skills in relation to computers and technology. In an acknowledgement of the ways computers were changing communication, the skills section was updated to require specific information in university submissions on the development of “computer skills (e.g. message preparation, desktop publishing)” and also “layout and production, dissemination, multimedia networks, print and audiovisual production, new communication technologies” (PRIA, 1996, p. 3).

**State and practitioner involvement.** In 1997, the NEC – now referred to as the National Education Committee Board (although subsequent correspondence continues to refer to the NEC) – consisted of three practitioners: Anderson (in Sydney), O’Sullivan and Ruth Rosh (both in Melbourne); and three educators: Synnott (at ECU in Perth), Bernie Murchison (at QUT in Brisbane) and Potts (who had transitioned between practice and education throughout the 1990s, and in 1997 had a professorial appointment at CSU in regional NSW, where he was responsible for preparing their accreditation submission and teaching public relations internationally). Only Rosh and Murchison had not been

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members of the NEC during the first accreditation round as Synnott had joined the NEC in 1992.

The responsibility for the initial review and assessment of university submissions rested with state-based education committees. State panels, established specifically to review university submissions for accreditation, were drawn from state education committees, if they existed, or PRIA state councils. On occasion, additional PRIA members were invited to assist with reviewing accreditation submissions. The panels usually included an NEC member if one lived in that state. These committees met to review and discuss university submissions, before reporting their recommendations to the NEC. On occasion, they asked the NEC for guidance, particularly in relation to policy issues such as the inclusion of undergraduate units in postgraduate courses. Membership and indeed nomenclature of the state committees varied. In one state, the “tertiary accreditation committee” consisted of five members: four practitioners (two worked in consultancies, one in the corporate sector, and the role of the fourth is unknown) and one educator, who was also a member of the NEC. In another state, the “course accreditation panel” consisted of two members of the NEC and two members of the [state] education committee; all four were practitioners. In a third state, the review panel consisted simply of five practitioners (all PRIA members, one of whom was a Fellow), who were working as

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5 For example, one state accreditation panel “tentatively recommends that the Masters of Arts degree be accredited by the PRIA if it is the National Committee’s policy to accredit Masters degrees which include undergraduate units.” Vice president, PRIA state council. (1998, March 30). “Accreditation of tertiary courses in public relations” [Facsimile to Marjorie Anderson, including cover sheet and state accreditation panel report]. Anderson archives (File 2).


public relations consultants or in the government sector.8

Universities had the opportunity to comment on the review panel’s recommendations prior to the NEC making a final decision about accreditation. As such, there is rich documentation in the second file of the Anderson archives regarding the engagement and interaction between state-level education committees and review panels, the universities, and the NEC. Often, the individual university advisory committees were also consulted. In one letter, Anderson requested “an initial response from your Public Relations Course Advisory Committee on the recommendations, and a strategy and proposed timeframe for dealing with the recommendations.”9 On occasion, chairs of the universities’ course advisory committees, rather than university staff members, wrote in response to the state panel recommendations.10 Therefore, there was a significant shift in accreditation processes, compared to the 1992–1996 accreditation round discussed in the previous chapter, as practitioners, through industry or course advisory committees and state education committees, were more actively involved both in course development and in discussion with the NEC on behalf of the university over accreditation issues.

I have no information from the Anderson archives as to why a decision was made to partially devolve accreditation back to state-based practitioner committees, and whether, for instance, it was in response to emerging tensions around the “national” rather than state based regulation of public relations courses. In an email, Anderson confirms “there was quite a bit of interest in being on the NEC and State representation came about”; consequently, “the ‘strength’ (or such) of the NEC dropped” (M. Anderson, September 20, 1997).

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2012). There is also evidence in the reports to, and minutes of, the PRIA national board of concerns, particularly from the College of Fellows in the mid-1990s, that university courses were failing to meet industry needs. For example, in 1994 the Fellows expressed concern about the “quality and suitability for industry of graduates of accredited university courses,” noting “TAFE [Technical and Further Education College] courses should be considered for accreditation as many graduates of those courses have proved themselves suitable for employment in the industry.”¹¹ The Fellows requested, and offered to assist with, “a survey of the quality and suitability of graduates of accredited university courses.” The Fellows preferred public relations courses, which had a stronger training or vocational focus. In the same meeting, Anderson stated there was a need to review accreditation and to update the Quarles and Potts (1990) report to include postgraduate education and to track graduate employment.¹² The PRIA sought government funding to commission such a report, but was not successful. A late 1990s study highlighted the discontent of senior PRIA members with university public relations education. In a Master’s thesis exploring PRIA accreditation of university courses in the 1990s, Starck argued:

> It appears reasonable to question the logic of a system which awards university courses the stamp of industry approval when those same courses are subjected to such a degree of criticism by senior practitioners.

That contradiction is amplified when the disapproval emanates from

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practitioners who are, or who have been, senior office-holders in the PRIA. (1999, p. 153)

Despite this concern, Starck called for greater involvement of the PRIA in public relations university education and recommended the PRIA could fund, among other things, the development of new textbooks written specifically for the Australian context.

The national PRIA board minutes during the mid-1990s confirm the interest of the College of Fellows in education. In 1994, the Fellows articulated a desire for public relations components to be taught in university marketing and management courses (despite the fact that the PRIA had no jurisdiction over these fields). In a meeting in late 1995, “Council [of the College of Fellows] recommended that University and TAFE courses should be assisted by making available more members with the appropriate knowledge and skills as lecturers.” In 1996, the Fellows, who were well represented at PRIA board meetings, requested a “limited recognition of degrees in disciplines such as economics, commerce, business, law, science and education” that are not accredited by the PRIA. This recognition was not granted in relation to the formal course accreditation process, but rather for practitioners in “senior positions” participating in the “Senior Professional Assessment process.”

In 1996, the College of Fellows requested changes to the PRIA’s “Eminent Visiting Practitioners” program, which had seen visits to Australia from American public relations practitioners.

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academics. The PRIA had brought several high-profile international scholars and practitioners to Australia. The national tour of Larissa and James Grunig to Australia in 1996 resulted in a financial loss for the PRIA National Board in the region of $7–10,000.\(^\text{16}\) In addition, individual state councils lost money although the national council agreed the visit had been successful and generated considerable media coverage. The Fellows requested that in future, “the program should include local eminent practitioners,” noting “overseas practitioners did not have to [be] brought in every year and the program could include ‘outstanding Australian practitioners.’”\(^\text{17}\) State councils provided feedback to a PRIA national questionnaire, and the visiting practitioners program subsequently included a combination of local and overseas practitioners.\(^\text{18}\) The following year, Potts and Peter Lazar, as high-profile Australian practitioners and Fellows, toured several states under the program; Potts also conducted senior professional assessments for members seeking regrading as part of this tour (“Visitors Add Value,” 1997). The Fellows sought, therefore, to have their expertise as senior practitioners with a unique understanding of the Australian context to be better recognised. In particular, given the Fellows’ ongoing interest in education, their understanding of industry-derived knowledge and expertise posed particular challenges for Australian university public relations education. In constructing the Fellows as the experts in Australian public relations, and in conceptualising the Australian industry as unique, it followed that their perspectives should significantly


The Australian public relations curriculum.

The Second Accreditation Round (1997–2001)

The second round of accreditation commenced in 1996. Late that year, Anderson accepted the appointment to National Executive Director of the PRIA on a part-time basis, a position she held concurrently with the NEC chair role until 1999. Anderson wrote to universities with existing accreditation on November 15, 1996, offering a prompt review of courses with the aim of confirming accreditation prior to the start of the academic year in 1997, and included the revised accreditation guidelines. Universities needed to provide information to demonstrate how their courses “reflect[ed] adherence to the educational aims in the guidelines” and evidence of “industry liaison in the development of the course”; “continuing liaison with industry”; and “profiles of teaching staff—education and experience.”

A status report on the second accreditation round prepared for the PRIA National Board in July 1997 offered a snapshot of progress in each state. It refers to the state accreditation panels, and those which included an NEC representative: Potts in NSW; Rosh and O’Sullivan in VIC; Murchison in QLD; and Synnott in WA. At that point, no courses from the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, South Australia, or Tasmania had been submitted for accreditation. Most undergraduate degrees were re-accredited and

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accreditation was recommended by the NEC for three Bachelor, four Graduate Diploma and one Master courses. A Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Mass Communication and a graduate certificate were rejected on the grounds they did not meet the accreditation criteria.

The first document in File 2 is also the final chapter for this accreditation round. It is a formal proposal to the PRIA National Board, prepared by Anderson, regarding “the structure and direction of the National Education Committee, for consideration at their November 2000 meeting”; the recommendations were developed in response to a discussion at the July 2000 board meeting. Anderson offers a number of recommendations to the board. These include retaining the NEC as an independent committee, and noting that “it was decided that as an industry group the Committee member number of practitioners should be greater than the number of academics.” Only academics lecturing in public relations at universities offering accredited courses would be eligible for NEC membership. Practitioner members had to meet two of the following requirements: be a senior PRIA member, university educated, involved in public relations education matters, and/or employ recent public relations graduates. The first task of the NEC in 2001 would be “to undertake a major review of the Accreditation Guidelines for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in preparation for accreditation/re-accreditation of courses after the current accreditation period, namely 31.12. 2001.” This change meant more practitioners – potentially without university-level education – would participate in the NEC, and contribute to the redevelopment of guidelines for university courses.

Anderson indicated she was available (as one of the practitioner members) to assist with

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the transition. As such, Anderson ensured her succession planning for the NEC in the twenty-first century.

**Defining the curriculum.** The deliberations of the state based accreditation panels and their formal reports to the NEC offer insights into panel members’ concerns in relation to public relations education. Many of these concerns identified the need for university education to address industry expectations and needs. These expectations regarding what students should be experiencing or learning in accredited public relations courses did not necessarily align with the PRIA accreditation guidelines; nevertheless, there is little evidence in the Anderson archives of the NEC not supporting the recommendations of the state panel as the NEC letters to universities replicated state council recommendations.

In addition to the formal accreditation guidelines, state review panels drew on their professional experiences and expectations of education to propose new units for the public relations curriculum. One panel identified “two other possible subjects … [with] development potential. They were: government relations and organisation structures and the impact on public relations.”

Some panels provided explicit feedback regarding not only their perceptions of the suitability of units in public relations courses, on occasion even going so far as to write a unit description for a unit they considered essential for a public relations course. In one state, the panel perceived “a broader treatment of media desirable” in response to a journalism unit. The panel recommended a journalism unit be completely rewritten to present a public relations perspective on the media, so that “students learn about media structures and the role of the media as gatekeepers in many

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public relations programs and activities.\textsuperscript{25} Such direction by the state panels is in contrast to the first accreditation round, where suggestions for suitable content were made by the NEC, but not to the extent of writing the unit outline. As such, the expectations of state panels around an appropriate curriculum from the industry perspective were arguably more functionalist (exemplified in the above quotation by the construction of the media as “gatekeepers”) in the second accreditation round, with fewer concerns expressed about the need for theory and critical practice.

One example of industry expectations was the issue of work experience or internships. Although “a practicum/internship/work experience component should be mandatory” and was considered in the written guidelines in both accreditation rounds in the 1990s to be most beneficial “late in the course” (PRIA, 1991, p. 4; PRIA, 1996, p. 3), one state panel demanded a university introduce “the additional component of a two-week work experience placement in a public relations environment during the first year of the course.”\textsuperscript{26} The state education committee was “planning a promotion of the Internship and Work experience programs at [other universities]” and was confident the industry could accommodate additional placements. In response, the chair of university’s course advisory committee wrote first year placements should not be mandatory as “consideration needs to be given to the respective educational merits of encouraging yet more work experience in first year as opposed to focusing on mastering the introductory subjects which put such experience in context.”\textsuperscript{27} The response, written by the chair of the state education committee, did not accept the university position and demanded: “an undertaking from

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\item[27] Chair, university course advisory committee. (1997, April 19). [Letter to NEC]. Anderson archives (File 2).
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your Committee to install a two-week compulsory work experience program for all students as part of the first year of the course prior to the 1998 academic year.”**28 Accreditation would be withheld unless the university agreed to this demand. Given that such a demand was not made of universities in other states, considerable leeway was given to state committees to develop their own processes around industry accreditation, even if their expectations were not strictly in line with the written accreditation criteria.

Concern about the development of writing skills was common feedback to universities. For example, a submission for a Graduate Diploma of Arts (Public Relations) was rejected “until such time as a unit covering writing skills is included as a compulsory core unit.”**29 Other state panels frequently identified the need for stronger writing skills in public relations graduates in their reports to the NEC.30 Yet another university, whose accreditation submission was successful, was nevertheless directed to address the lack of “an adequate business focus [in writing courses] as it is essential that graduates are able to write business letters, proposals, reports and submissions.”**31 Concerns about the perceived failure of universities to adequately develop professional writing skills in future practitioners were widespread.

Panels made textbook and reading recommendations to universities. Feedback offered to universities by the NEC chair included: “the [state] Panel had only one issue of

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28 Chair, state education committee. (1997, June 1). “Accreditation of [university] undergraduate and postgraduate public relations courses” [Letter to chair of university course advisory committee]. Anderson archives (File 2).
30 See, for example: Vice president, PRIA state council. (1998, March 30). “Accreditation of tertiary courses in public relations” [Facsimile cover sheet and accreditation panel report to Marjorie Anderson]. Anderson archives (File 2).
concern that is the small number of texts (published after 1990) on the reading list”32 and, to another university, “Library holdings should be reviewed with a view to the university significantly increasing – possibly to triple – over the next three years, its reference resources with contemporary publications relevant to the Australian business environment.”33 It was not uncommon for review panels, comprised primarily of practitioners, to make suggestions for textbooks, often recommending US textbooks to suit particular courses. For example, one state council recommended “that at least one of the Grunig texts be included as essential reading in the program, particularly for the subject PR Theory and Practice.”34

The need for a stronger distinction between undergraduate and postgraduate level courses emerged in the analysis of correspondence in the archives. As noted earlier in this chapter, a state panel requested policy advice from the NEC regarding the inclusion of undergraduate units in postgraduate courses. One university wrote to the NEC to explain the university’s rationale for expecting Masters-level students to share lectures with undergraduate students:

The other factor is the entry level of education of my Masters students. None of them have previous degrees in public relations … Because they have degrees in unrelated disciplines which qualify them for entry into a coursework Masters degree, they have to undergo a complete education in public relations.35

The educator makes a strong case for Masters students being extended through “their

tutorials and seminars and in the extra coursework required at Masters level.” However, Anderson responded on behalf of the NEC, citing “a need for further and critical review of the criteria for accreditation of postgraduate courses” and stating that “further research and consultation is required on how best to serve the needs of postgraduate students.”

Anderson writes at the conclusion of the letter that “accreditation of the [university] Masters has not been declined but will remain pending.” There is no correspondence in the file which indicates how this situation regarding the postgraduate curriculum was resolved.

Public relations education in Australia and Asia. The significant trade links between Asia and Australia in the 1990s, along with changes in Australian government education policy, offered opportunities for Australian universities to seek new markets. Public relations was a popular course, attracting international undergraduate and postgraduate students, mostly from Asian countries. In the second half of the 1990s, international students made up a major proportion of students in public relations undergraduate and postgraduate courses at some universities. In 1998, for example, sixty per cent of Masters’ students in a public relations course at one institution were from “Indonesia, China, Malaysia and increasingly Northern Europe.” However, there is little evidence the changing student cohort had a significant impact on the deliberations of the accreditation committees, other than in the concern expressed by some state panels regarding English literacy standards among students of non-English speaking background. In response to submissions from several universities, one panel requested:

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“adequate access to English writing support subjects for students from non-English speaking backgrounds.” Such requests suggest the panels were aware of the changing composition of the student cohort. One panel requested a media unit be rewritten to compare “Australian journalism and that of other countries … and should also include Japan (as one of Australia’s most significant trading partners).” However, the feedback regarding international public relations to universities from state panels was not consistent. In another state, one university was informed a more global, rather than an Asian focus, was required: “There is a heavy focus on Asia in this subject and we recommend that [university] look to incorporating broader international subjects that explore the rest of the global economy as well as Asia.”

In the second half of the decade, some Australian universities increasingly offered their public relations courses in locations outside Australia. One university wrote to the NEC in 1998 outlining their existing partnership with a Malaysian college and an invitation to offer their undergraduate course, a Bachelor of Arts (Public Relations), in Singapore.

Demand for public relations in the Asia-Pacific Region is growing in proportion to the spread of public relations as a management discipline in the region. Australia, as the regional leader in the field, has a responsibility, we believe, to help develop the profession and the professional competencies of practitioners there. I know you share that view.

The university proposed a joint venture with the PRIA but there is no evidence in the Anderson archives this opportunity was taken up. The letter is significant as it confirms the

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export of public relations courses outside of Australia as universities continued to seek alternative revenue sources, the positioning of public relations as a management discipline, and the perception of Australia’s “leadership role” in public relations. Quarles made similar claims, describing Australia as “the leader in developing public relations university programs in the Asia-Pacific region” (1993, p. 21). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the public relations industry links between Australia and Asian countries. However, the influence of Western university education on Southeast Asian public relations is well recognised (Sriramesh, 2004).

**Academic staff.** The 1996 accreditation guidelines are more specific than the 1991 guidelines regarding the qualifications and experience of public relations educators. As in the first national accreditation round, educators were expected to hold a degree, have significant professional experience, and to continue their professional development. However, in a change in the updated criteria, the course coordinator was expected to be “a fulltime, senior academic” with “an undergraduate degree with a major in public relations/communication … [and] have a higher degree, or be working toward a higher degree, in the communication field … and extensive practical experience in public relations” (PRIA, 1996, p. 5). This expectation did exist in relation to the first round, as demonstrated by the example in the previous chapter where a university’s accreditation was withheld until a senior appointment was made. However, this requirement was not included in the original written criteria.

Given that higher degrees, or at least enrolment in a higher degree, became mandatory for public relations course coordinators in the second accreditation round, the PRIA began to value the traditional markers of academic legitimacy and professional
recognition. However, Anderson, as NEC chair, supported at least two university lecturers’ applications for promotion to professorial positions without a PhD. The letters Anderson wrote are revealing in terms of the attempt to redefine traditional academic qualifications in relation to the public relations discipline. For instance, Anderson writes to one promotions committee:

This letter is to confirm the opinion I have given previously … that an appropriate Masters degree is a sufficient qualification for an appointment at the Associate Professor level in public relations in Australia.

There are very few PhDs in public relations. Public relations is a comparatively new field of study and there were few opportunities at the PhD level for individuals who now have the experience to make them worthy candidates for promotion to Associate Professor.

In my opinion, the creation of Associate Professor positions in this new field should increase opportunities for rigorous academic research and growth of the profession.42

Anderson’s support of professorial appointments for public relations educators to senior positions in the academy constitutes a recognition that the industry needs such appointments in order to gain both academic legitimacy and professional recognition. She also acknowledges the role of research in developing the profession. As such, from the industry perspective, senior appointments in the academy were perceived to assist in improving the professional standing of public relations but were based on professional

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experience in industry rather than traditional academic expectations around scholarly research.

**Disciplinary boundaries.** The ongoing demarcation disputes and threats of encroachment from other fields influenced the responses of various PRIA committees to university accreditation submissions. Correspondence from universities suggests many of the “newer” fields of study were converging in the mid- to late 1990s in terms of course structure. One university wrote to the NEC in 1996 to advise them of changes to the public relations course, as part of a university-wide restructure:

> the first year’s study is now taken in common with the Advertising/Marketing students. That academic year provides some ten weeks’ study of Public Relations, a similar period of Advertising and about six weeks study of Marketing, to provide students with an understanding of marketing communication.\(^{43}\)

As part of the restructure, the degree was no longer a Bachelor of Arts (Communication) but rather a named degree, a Bachelor of Communication. The proliferation in courses in this decade led to a number of named degrees, rather than generic Bachelor or Masters of Arts degree courses (see Appendix B). As noted in Chapter 2, a similar trend occurred in communication studies (Borland, 1995). Typically in this later accreditation round, universities submitted multiple courses for accreditation, with some institutions submitting up to five or six undergraduate and postgraduate courses. At the same time, new fields of study were created. For example, one university submitted a Public Affairs course for accreditation; although the state-based education committee thought a course in public

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affairs was “a good idea,” they did not consider it met the PRIA accreditation requirements.44

An industry practitioner, who completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Communication (Public Relations), wrote to the NEC querying in effect the approved public relations curriculum.45 The student complained about the inclusion of a health sciences unit in their course. It is difficult to know if the complainant is concerned because it is a non-arts unit or simply because, in their words, the health faculty “is dominated by an extreme feminist paradigm.” Given widespread concerns within the PRIA around the rapid feminisation of the public relations industry in the 1980s and 1990s and the implications for its professional standing, as discussed in Chapter 1, this complaint may indicate professional anxiety around the gendering of public relations, rather than concern about the disciplinary home of a single unit in their postgraduate course. Unfortunately, the NEC’s response, if any, is not included in the file.

Analysing the responses to various university submissions for accreditation offers some insights into the ways the PRIA, through its various education committees, defined, and indeed understood, even implicitly, the emerging disciplinary boundaries for public relations within the academy, and their preferred disciplinary or faculty home. I therefore consider the various state panel and NEC responses to submissions in relation to media, journalism, marketing, and business courses below.

**Journalism and media studies.** Universities often offered both public relations and journalism within communication studies courses. However, from the industry perspective,
journalism education was not adequate training for future public relations practitioners. The reasons given to universities offer an insight into how the state panels perceived public relations. For example, feedback to a university about a postgraduate course noted concern: “that your committee considers an Advanced Journalism subject to be an appropriate substitute for a specific public relations writing subject which focuses on writing in a range of styles for a wider range of audiences.” ⁴⁶ In rejecting one university submission for a Bachelor of Journalism (Public Relations and Public Affairs), another state accreditation panel cited the need for staff with public relations industry experience and for a course which includes the “the strategic side of public relations such as planning, running of campaigns, evaluation, community relations.” ⁴⁷ In addition, the panel cited specific concerns about a Bachelor of Journalism gaining accreditation, including “differences between journalism and public relations—journalism is one-way communication for example.”

While journalism courses were not considered suitable preparation for public relations careers, an understanding of the media industry and its practices was central to the public relations curriculum. In the accreditation guidelines, the only specific references to the media industry are in the section on skill development, where it is specified that students need to learn about “writing and editing for a range of media” and “message preparation and delivery … publicity and media relations” (PRIA, 1996, p. 3). Media relations is not listed as content to be covered in the “public relations core,” although “management activities, including marketing, international, investor and corporate

relations, human resources, industrial relations, government relations, community relations, sponsorship and fund-raising” are (PRIA, 1996, p. 3). The omission of media relations is curious. Anderson describes the activities of her public relations consultancy, Anderson Knight, founded in 1987, as “corporate affairs, marketing communications, community and media relations work.” Similarly, the commonly used textbooks included chapters on media relations. Therefore, from the industry perspective, the focus of public relations education should not be media relations, despite, or perhaps because of, the dominance of former journalists at senior levels within the PRIA. The emphasis on public relations as a strategic management discipline in public relations education meant that links with journalism and media relations activity, founded on relationships with journalists, were minimised.

Responses to the inclusion of media studies as part of the public relations core were not consistent across state panels. For example, one university’s submission for a Bachelor of Arts (Mass Communication) was rejected for being “too media focused.” Another university was advised to offer “a broader treatment of media” in its Bachelor of Arts (Public Relations). Other panels requested similar concerns were addressed before accreditation of courses could be considered. One submission, a Bachelor of Arts (Mass Communication), was firmly rejected by the state panel. In addition to a lack of industry liaison in the course development, the chair of the state tertiary accreditation committee informed the NEC:

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The committee feels that the application, and the course, is a little “thin” in that it is
very media/marketing focused and doesn’t appear to include any of the latest, more
strategic thinking on public relations. The course appears to have been “cobbled”
together from existing units in marketing, media and mass communication.51

In this case, the panel suggests the university is opportunistic in applying for industry
recognition, without offering a coherent and focused sequence of units specific to public
relations.

Marketing and business. State accreditation panels encouraged a greater focus on
marketing and business units, considering these offered a better preparation for careers in
public relations than, for example, journalism and media studies units. Both the 1991 and
the 1996 guidelines state practitioners’ preference for “business studies” as part of the 75%
of support studies outside the professional core. However, the guidelines also note the
value of “arts and social sciences” for “helping practitioners to understand an increasingly
complex world … and for developing critical faculties” (PRIA, 1991, p. 3; PRIA, 1996, p.
4). Despite a successful submission, one university was nevertheless encouraged by the
NEC – on the recommendation of the state panel – to enrol students in business units as
part of the students’ support studies beyond the professional core:

Business focus—where possible incorporate business subjects as electives into the
course. Students need to be directed to these subjects and their value clearly
communicated by faculty staff. This is particularly important where the second
qualification studied is not a business degree.52

51 Chair, PRIA [state] tertiary accreditation committee. (1999, April 12). [Email to Marjorie
Anderson]. Anderson archives (File 2).
accreditation” [Letter to Marjorie Anderson]. Anderson archives (File 2).
State panels requested universities include more management content in the public relations curriculum “such as project management, people management, consultancy management, etc.”\(^53\) As identified in the previous section, the accreditation guidelines specifically position public relations as a management activity and align it with “other management activities” (PRIA, 1991, p. 5; PRIA, 1996, p. 3). In line with the dominant paradigm, the professional standing of public relations was perceived to rely on its recognition as a management activity.

Other state panels wanted a stronger focus on marketing in public relations courses, despite the potential rivalry between marketing and public relations (which in the following feedback is not a concern):

The panel is concerned that in response to its observations of the need for a **stronger marketing perspective** in the course, your committee offers only a statement of intention to considerably broaden the scope of the *Principles and Practices of Public Relations* to emphasise the role of PR in the marketing mix. The panel requires details as to how and when these modifications will be made before re-accreditation can be considered.\(^54\)

It is worth noting that these concerns regarding the need for public relations courses to adopt a stronger marketing orientation were not consistent across different state panels. However, the NEC adopted and in turn communicated the feedback from state panels to the universities. The written accreditation criteria notes that although “students in marketing degree courses often take units in public relations as minor studies,” such courses will not


\(^{54}\) Chair, state education committee. (1997, June 1). “Accreditation of public relations courses” [Letter to university]. Anderson archives (File 2).
be considered for accreditation (PRIA, 1996, p. 1); this statement was not part of the earlier
criteria and presumably stems from concern regarding the need to establish public relations
as a distinct activity. Nevertheless, some panels demanded a marketing focus in the public
relations professional core. In practice, senior PRIA members worked in both marketing
and public relations roles; Anderson, for instance was an Associate Fellow of the
Australian Marketing Institute and Vice President of CAMSA at the same time she was a
member of the PRIA National Board, NEC chair, and the PRIA’s Executive Director.55
Tymson is a Fellow of both the PRIA and the Australian Marketing Institute (Tymson,
n.d.). There are mixed understandings by PRIA members regarding public relations and
marketing; some accepted that the two fields overlapped or complemented each other in
practice, while others maintained public relations and marketing are unique and separate
disciplines. A special issue of PRIA’s national journal, *The PRofessional*, was devoted to
marketing communication. The editor noted “marketing communication was an integral
part of public relations” (Berryman, c. 1996, p. 4) and authors of various articles attest to
“the important role public relations can play in the marketing mix” (Factor, c. 1996, p. 11)
and identify “public relations as a tool of marketing” (Williams, c. 1996, p. 13).

**Professional knowledge.** The expectation that the accreditation process would
ensure university courses addressed industry needs resulted in practitioners on PRIA
committees demanding these courses develop in students the skills and knowledge
practitioners perceived as necessary in job-ready graduates. As such, practitioner
understandings of the role and content of education drew on their expectations of
employees, effectively defining their understanding of the role of public relations education

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biography for Anderson on Anderson-Knight letterhead]. Anderson archives (File 2).
and indeed the constitution of public relations knowledge. As I discussed in Chapter 2, practitioners value years of industry experience rather than university education (van Ruler, 2005) and perceive industry experience as constituting expert knowledge (Pieczka, 2002). One university was requested to comment on state panel feedback that their promoted course outcome – that graduates would have “enough expertise in public relations decision-making to be able to move into consulting work or public relations management” – as too ambitious; the panel noted that graduates require a lot of “hand-holding before they are able to claim expertise in public relations decision-making.”

From the practitioner perspective, then, this expertise, constituted in industry practice, should significantly inform the public relations curriculum; at the same time, precisely because such knowledge and expertise was understood to be constituted in practice, universities were unable to effectively develop this expertise in the academic environment.

The incorporation of practitioner perspectives into the public relations curriculum, and in tandem, the recognition of senior PRIA members as experts, was critical for the PRIA and informed panel assessments of university accreditation submissions. One state panel identified the lack of “staff with industry experience” as a problem and suggested the NEC explain to the university “how other universities run visiting speaker programs … or [have] in residence a local practitioner.” In addition, the state panel suggested the state council “may be able to assist [the university] through the identification of practitioners who may be able to guest lecture” and “in supporting students to find work experience.” In addition, many of the practitioners who made up the state education committees sought

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greater involvement with their local universities. For example, one committee chair wrote to the NEC: “the committee has asked me to discuss the accreditation guidelines—the group has some ideas for development e.g. face to face reviews and meeting with students, etc.”

If universities were unsuccessful in their accreditation submissions, most state committees as well as the NEC offered to work with the university in redeveloping their public relations course.

**Implications For Public Relations Education**

The findings reported in this and the previous chapters focus on the perspectives of PRIA members, through various committees towards public relations education, and, in turn, the interaction between educators and practitioners on university course advisory committees. In this chapter, analysis of the Anderson archives in relation to the later accreditation round (1997–2001) allows a comparison of the priorities and expectations of the PRIA in each round. Themes that emerged from the analysis of documents in relation to the second accreditation round include an emphasis on practitioner expertise, more practitioner involvement in university education, and stronger expectations that universities would develop suitable employees for the public relations workforce. This last point is significant in that universities were expected to train future employees. That is, in comparison with the first accreditation round, the various PRIA committees sought a more pragmatic outcome from university public relations education and were less concerned with the need for a general and broad university-level education. Indeed, state panel members preferred a stronger business or management orientation in degree courses over general arts or science courses.

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The comparison between the two accreditation rounds demonstrates the impact of the shift in the professional association’s approaches to public relations education. With the partial devolution of assessment of accreditation submissions to state-based, practitioner committees in the second round, there was greater intervention or more detailed feedback and directions given to universities on behalf of the PRIA. This observation may be a consequence of state-based committees reporting their deliberations to the NEC by way of memoranda, detailing their concerns. Most of the “evidence” from the first round in the Anderson files is the correspondence to universities, confirming the outcomes of discussion and offering specific feedback, and brief file notes between NEC members or state councils. Nevertheless, there is clear indication of different approaches to public relations education by the professional association between the two rounds as a consequence of this shift in responsibility for reviewing accreditation submissions to state councils and panels.

The impact of this procedural change marginalised the efforts of the NEC earlier in the decade to promote scholarly endeavours for public relations, in favour of a greater focus on practitioners’ concerns, needs, and expectations of public relations education. As noted in Chapter 2, there was a significant increase in scholarly public relations activity in the second half of the 1990s in Australia, illustrated in the publication of a special issue of the *Australian Journal of Communication* in 1997 (L’Etang, 2009; Petelin, 2005). Practitioner concerns, however, meant there was a clear expectation on the part of the PRIA that universities would prepare students for industry practice. The state-based committees responsible for the initial assessment of university submissions in the second accreditation round were more interventionist than the NEC in the first accreditation round. In the first accreditation round, universities were encouraged to offer unique courses,
liberal arts or broad, generalised education was valued, and the accreditation criteria, in the words of the NEC chair, were designed to allow “each institution individuality with respect to the total content of the degree course.” In contrast, in the second national accreditation round, universities were advised which units they should include in their courses, and given specific advice regarding curriculum content, over and above the PRIA (1996) accreditation guidelines. Often this advice was based on practitioner perceptions of industry requirements and expertise; for example, panels identified the need for English literacy and writing skills, business and management skills, stronger marketing perspectives, an understanding of the media as “gatekeepers,” or of Japan, as Australia’s biggest trading partner.

The traditional markers of academic legitimacy or disciplinarity were less relevant to the professional association in the second national accreditation round, as a stronger emphasis on meeting industry needs and confirming the status of public relations as a business or management profession emerged. The possible exception is industry concerns about the seniority of course coordinators within the academic institution, although this concern may stem from anxiety about the standing of public relations within the institution. In Chapter 2, I discussed the significant growth in public relations scholarship in Australia in the mid- to late 1990s; in precisely the same years, the PRIA became increasingly concerned about the need for stronger industry perspectives and professional knowledge, constituted in industry practice, to be incorporated into university public relations education.

In the second accreditation round, the NEC endorsed the recommendations of state review panels whose expectations around the role of education emerged from an

understanding of public relations expertise drawn from industry experience and practice. For the PRIA, then, public relations knowledge in these years is construed as emerging from industry experience. The value placed on practical experience is illustrated by the demand of one state panel for compulsory work experience for first year students (despite not being a formal requirement in the PRIA, 1996, guidelines). Another example is expectations around the active involvement of practitioners in public relations education, through course advisory committees, guest lectures, workshops, internship programs, and even through “practitioner-in-residence” and “visiting eminent practitioner” programs. Although ongoing industry liaison and the existence of a course advisory committee were features of both accreditation rounds, the expectations around industry engagement and practitioner involvement in education were greater in the later round, particularly around work experience and socialisation for students into public relations practice.

The findings presented in this chapter confirm that for many PRIA members involved in education committees, public relations knowledge was constituted in industry practice rather than in universities. As such, the disciplinary boundaries of public relations, as a distinct and coherent body of knowledge, are constituted by the professional association in terms of practitioner expectations of potential employees and their industry-constituted understandings of public relations expertise. In seeking to establish public relations as a profession, PRIA state-based practitioner committees valued a greater business and marketing focus in public relations courses and sought to minimise links with journalism or promotion. This perception may be informed by the attempts of the PRIA to establish public relations as a strategic management function distinct from marketing. In practice, the boundaries between public relations and marketing were more permeable.
However, journalism units were not perceived as suitable preparation for public relations careers. Within the academy, however, the proliferation of communication studies courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels meant some degree of convergence with, for example, the introduction of common first year courses for public relations, marketing, and advertising students. Beyond the Anderson archives, there is evidence of growing dissatisfaction within the PRIA of university-level education and its capacity to meet industry expectations.

**Conclusion**

The findings reported in this chapter are significant for this thesis because they offer evidence of the ways in which the professional association, through various committees and individual practitioners, as well as through the accreditation guidelines and processes, understood the role of Australian public relations education in the mid- to late 1990s. This understanding, that is, the PRIA’s expectations of public relations education and the implicit constitution of public relations knowledge, was not static or consistent in the 1990s. Analysis of the Anderson archives in relation to the second national accreditation round reveals new perspectives, which contribute to theoretical insights into the perceptions of Australian public relations education by the industry body.

The first insight relates to the shift from a single national committee reviewing accreditation submissions to the greater involvement of state based review panels, made up of primarily practitioners. The priorities for public relations education of these state panels were informed by their understandings and constitution of public relations expertise, often drawn from their experiences as practitioners and as employers. This interpretation of public relations knowledge informed their review of public relations courses for formal
PRIA accreditation. The value placed on practical experience gained in industry is illustrated by demands for compulsory work experience for first year students and suggestions for practitioner-in-residence programs. Expectations around industry engagement and practitioner involvement in university education were higher in the later round.

The second insight relates to the disciplinary home of public relations. The state review panels, and in turn, the NEC, emphasised the need for a greater business and marketing focus in public relations courses. Journalism units were rejected. As such, the PRIA constituted a public relations body of knowledge, establishing jurisdiction and defining boundaries over what kinds of subjects were suitable to make up the professional core of public relations units. Within the academy, the proliferation of communication studies courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels meant some degree of convergence with marketing, journalism, and advertising. In contrast to the emphasis on a broad, general education in the first national accreditation round, the PRIA committees in the late 1990s preferred a business and management approach, along with a stronger marketing focus, in accredited courses. This preference may have been fuelled by practitioners’ experiences and attempts to situate public relations as a management discipline, establish its value for business, gain professional status, and in tandem, suppress its association with publicity and media relations and its reputation as the domain of “former journalists.”

In general, much of the feedback offered by state review panels and adopted by the NEC related to pragmatic and functionalist understandings of public relations. The third insight, therefore relates to expectations around the need for public relations education to
“meet industry needs.” Despite evidence of the growing diversity of the student cohort at Australian universities, state review panels’ interest in international public relations in the curriculum was primarily determined by trade concerns, an understanding of international media as “gatekeepers,” or the maintenance of English language and literacy standards. As such, their perceptions of public relations education primarily emerged from their expectations and experiences as practitioners and employers. However, these perceptions and expectations varied between state panels and did not necessarily conform to the written accreditation guidelines.

The final insight is drawn from analysis of the PRIA national council archives. The Fellows, as the elite members of the PRIA, became the designated repository of public relations expertise. Many Fellows played active roles in the regulation of public relations education and training, and reports from the College of Fellows in PRIA board minutes in the mid-1990s reveal their concern that PRIA-accredited courses were failing to meet industry needs, particularly in terms of producing work-ready graduates. These concerns contributed to the shift in accreditation processes between the first and second accreditation rounds. As such, the tension between practice and theory continued to inform the public relations curriculum, particularly as the Fellows sought greater recognition of their expertise in Australian public relations through, for example, their inclusion in the visiting eminent practitioner program, alongside international scholars.

In this and the previous chapter, I have focused primarily on the perspectives of the professional association, the PRIA, through its archives and institutional processes, in relation to public relations education in Australia in the 1990s. In the following chapter, I present the findings drawn from an analysis of interviews with educators, practitioners, and
scholars who each had different roles in the development of public relations education in Australia. This approach allows me to explore in more depth various perspectives on public relations education.
Chapter 6: Perceptions of Australian Public Relations Education

Introduction

In this chapter, I investigate practitioner and educator perceptions and understandings of public relations education and professional practice. I interviewed educators and practitioners who contributed to the development of public relations in higher education through various roles on PRIA state or national councils, accreditation and education committees, their university employment, or who, as employers of graduates, were interested in education. Participants’ experiences range from the 1960s through to the contemporary era; however my focus in this chapter is primarily on public relations education and on changes in the industry and in higher education in the 1980s and 1990s.

Analysis of these interviews allows an in-depth understanding of diverse experiences of, and personal responses to, higher education in relation to the public relations industry. In addition, the information obtained in interviews can address some of the limitations of archival research. As discussed in Chapter 3, I recognise interviews do not provide an authentic rendering of “reality.” However, I argue the stated, retrospective experiences offered in interviews can provide valuable insights into processes and decision-making and offer alternative perspectives on widely accepted historical narratives. These insights relate to the development of the public relations curriculum and the emerging disciplinarity of public relations. As I have established in previous chapters, education was a key component in the industry’s professionalisation drive, but the fledgling status of public relations within the academy and divergent understandings of public relations knowledge and expertise, and of the role of education, impacted on the
careers of individual academics and the development of the curriculum.

I present in this chapter the themes and categories that emerged out of the analysis of the interview transcripts. I discuss participant perceptions in relation to other evidence, drawing on archival and secondary sources, in order to offer a historical context in which to ground participant understandings and recollections. This chapter is structured in four sections. In the first section, I explore perceptions of the significance of university education for an industry seeking professional legitimacy. In the second section, I consider how educators perceive their academic careers and scholarly activities, their engagement with the professional association, and the development of the public relations curriculum. I investigate in the next section the status of public relations within the academy, and its attempt to develop a unique identity and establish disciplinary boundaries. Finally, I discuss the implications of these findings in terms of the development of public relations education and the constitution of public relations knowledge in Australia.

**Education and Professionalisation**

**Regulating professional membership.** In June 1985, the PRIA introduced stricter criteria for professional memberships, as discussed in Chapter 1 ("Public Relations Institute," 1985). Professional-grade members were required to hold an approved degree or sit a practitioner examination, first offered in 1986 and written by Potts, as the PRIA’s National Examiner. A university education was not essential for practising public relations and becoming a member of the PRIA; however, it was becoming increasingly important. Putnis acknowledged the significance of higher education for “new kinds of professional areas,” and how university courses served a role in “enhancing the status of professions.” The introduction of public relations courses in the tertiary sector can therefore be viewed as
one strategy to enhance the professional standing of the field, primarily through the
regulation not only of education and training, but, from 1985, the criteria for PRIA
membership. Anderson, who was PRIA national president in 1992 and 1993 and chaired
the NEC from 1991 until 2000, acknowledged the significance of university education for
the industry:

People were committed to growing their profession and they recognised that it had
to be done through education. So there was never a question that what the hell are
you doing? People who had come through journalism and moved in did recognise
there was a need to rise up above whatever it was holding you down and how could
you do it? There really had to be a way to do it and that was really recognised as
education was the answer.

However, as the PRIA attempted to develop professional standards and establish
jurisdiction over public relations activity through increasing regulation of PRIA
membership with the introduction of either a practitioner examination or an accredited
degree to qualify for professional-grade membership, they identified the need to protect
existing members from meeting the more rigorous entrance requirements. I noted in
Chapter 1 the reluctance of practitioners to sit the written examination and resistance by
state councils to what they perceived as a Sydney bias in the accreditation panel.1 Tymson,
in her capacity as a PRIA state president in the 1980s, described the resistance at state level
to the introduction of these stricter membership requirements: “when they [the national

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1 See, for example, various articles in PRIA (WA) newsletters which illustrate both the
unpopularity of the written practitioner examination and initial state council concerns about PRIA
(National) council plans for greater regulation of members from a Sydney office (“Candidates
office] were trying to introduce the accreditation … we weren't happy about it … so we threatened to withhold our funds.” Tymson recalled how the PRIA subsequently introduced a grandfather clause in 1990, exempting senior practitioners from the need for either a university education or the practitioner examination. Instead, as Potts recalled, “people who had been in the industry for years and for whom we believed it would be inappropriate to ask them to sit down to do an examination” were offered a senior professional assessment. Potts later describes this assessment, which was offered to practitioners without a university degree, in terms of an informal discussion: “I would enjoy meeting with them and quizzing them about their knowledge of PR and how they practised it and so on.” These senior professional assessments were introduced five years after the introduction of stricter membership requirements by the PRIA in 1985; eligibility for an interview rather than the examination was determined first by the PRIA state council and then the national examination panel, headed by Potts, and applicants needed a minimum of ten years professional experience (“Exam Can Be Taken,” 1990).

**Education and professionalisation.** University education in the 1990s was perceived by participants to improve the professional standing of the public relations industry and confirm its status as a management discipline. Participant perceptions therefore confirm L’Etang’s (2008a) assertion, discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, regarding the significance of education for professionalisation. For example, in the interview conducted for this research, Anderson noted the lack of public relations topics in courses such as Masters of Business Administration, and acknowledged the understanding among senior PRIA members that public relations: “should be up there in the general management team … there was always the concern to get the foot into education and help build it up through
education.” Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 5, the College of Fellows wanted public relations included in business management courses. Another practitioner, who served on state and national PRIA councils, perceived university education would establish public relations as a management discipline:

We didn’t want PR to be left in that kind of situation where we were very much seen as support people rather than as professionals who really could help an organisation achieve its business objectives very strategically. So it was about that, but it was also really about furthering our inner education mandate really to ensure that people in the profession lifted their professional standards and lifted their knowledge levels, because … we still weren’t seeing a lot of public relations practitioners who you could say really understood business and finance and corporate strategy, typically all the things that you’ve got to be good at to get a seat at the table. (Participant 9)

This participant perceived university education could offer a way for the public relations industry to establish its contribution to business and corporate activity and its management status and, as I discuss below, counter concerns about its feminisation.

The industry’s quest for greater professional recognition was underpinned by the establishment of university degrees or practitioner examinations as prerequisites for PRIA professional-grade membership in 1985 and later, the introduction of a standardised accreditation program for university courses in 1991. As part of the push towards greater professional recognition, the use of research, the development of measurable objectives, and of a communication strategy, rather than “common sense” or “gut instinct” were perceived by several participants as important in repositioning public relations away from
promotion and media relations towards a more strategic, professional and indeed “accountable” practice (Participant 10; Participant 4). When asked about the significance of university education for the profession, one participant replied: “Absolutely critical. We had no methodologies. I used to dream things up on the run” (Participant 10). In this way, university education was perceived to offer a systematic rigour to the research and development of public relations campaigns.

**Gender and education.** All participants perceived public relations as a highly gendered industry in Australia in the 1980s, partly due to the number of mostly male ex-journalists working in public relations roles, describing public relations in the 1980s and even in the 1990s as “very blokey” and male dominated (Participant 10; Participant 6; Yorke). As reported in Fitch and Third (2014), Phase 2 participants recalled “most of the people who came into the profession were men, there weren’t that many women coming into the profession from journalism” (Participant 6) and “the majority of public relations people … in the 80s were ex journalists” (Yorke). Five participants (B. Mackey; S. Mackey; Participant 6; Potts; Smith), four of whom are men, had moved into public relations careers from journalism backgrounds, confirming 1985 research that found journalism was a common route for men, but not women, into public relations roles (“PR Industry at the Crossroads,” 1985).²

The significance of this gendering for public relations is an increasingly segregated industry, as discussed in Chapter 1, with implications for how professional activity, expertise, and knowledge in public relations are constituted. B. Mackey, who served as a state and national PRIA president in the 1980s, described what was effectively a “boys’

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² The report notes that although almost half (46%) of the participants had backgrounds in journalism, fewer women (only 28% of female participants) had entered the industry via journalism.
network” that assisted practitioners in obtaining media coverage, and maintained that in the 1980s, public relations relied on relationships between journalists and ex-journalists. He observed: “Practically every one of them [public relations practitioners] had joined the newspaper from school as a cadet … and they were all convinced the only people who could do it [PR] were ex-journalists because that’s where we all come from.” Female participants also observed in their early careers in the 1970s and 1980s that public relations expertise was understood primarily as the capacity to network with journalists.

In the 1980s, as discussed in Chapter 1, public relations became increasingly institutionalised in government and corporate spheres and the PRIA sought greater professional recognition. A university education was rare among practitioners who were former journalists; in fact, B. Mackey acknowledged ironically a fellow PRIA state councillor who in the early 1980s: “actually had a degree and we thought what a strange coot, he’s got a degree … and we thought this was very funny.” In this decade, the PRIA’s professionalisation agenda meant industry attitudes towards university education changed. B. Mackey acknowledged the industry began to recognise the value of a broad university education, as graduates “actually knew about the constitution … political history in this country and … about social welfare.” In 1989, for instance, an announcement of three new consultants at the Perth office of International Public Relations was made in the PRIA (WA) newsletter, Profile (“New Faces at IPR,” 1989). None of the appointees – all women and all university graduates – held a degree in public relations. Their qualifications included a Bachelor of Science (Psychology and Human Physical Performance); a Bachelor of Arts (English and Comparative Literature); and a Bachelor of Arts (Journalism and Business).
One unanticipated outcome of the introduction of public relations courses to higher education was the increasing feminisation of the industry. In Australia the proportion of women working in public relations increased from 10% in the early 1970s to approximately 50% in the early 1980s (Zawawi, 2009). In 2002, Rea noted that “women are pouring … into higher education courses in public relations” in Australia and dominated public relations teaching, and that as a result of its “steady feminisation” in Australia in previous decades the “face of public relations is female” (2002, pp. 1, 2). Certainly, the numerical dominance of female students in public relations courses into the 1990s is confirmed in a number of sources, including the Quarles and Potts (1990) report, which states women made up 80% of public relations students at Australian universities. In a 1997 national study investigating the attitudes of 82 graduates of PRIA-accredited degrees towards their public relations education, 87% of participants were female.³ Similarly, Rea (2002) suggests anecdotal evidence confirms female students make up approximately 80% of Australian public relations courses.

The number of women graduating with public relations degrees was viewed as problematic for the professional status of the industry although, paradoxically, the degrees had been supported by the PRIA as they were perceived to enhance the industry’s professional status. One participant acknowledged “professions that are dominated by women, like nursing and teaching, are the ones where salaries don’t increase as much as they should’ and that public relations was in danger of being relegated to a support or technical function rather than a profession (Participant 9). The issue of the industry’s

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³ The study, “Public relations education in Australia: Perceptions of recent graduates” was conducted by three Curtin Business School Honours students, Bridget O’Donohue, Maureen Mawson and Louise Warner, under the supervision of Dr Frank Marra. The NEC made a financial contribution to the study (“PR Education,” 1997).
feminisation was an ongoing concern for the PRIA in the 1980s and into the 1990s, with a perceived need to guard against public relations being thought of as a “pink profession” (Participant 9) as public relations “would devalue” and “be downgraded” (Participant 10).4 Such perceptions are supported by the findings of the PRIA-commissioned ChanMac Services report in 1985, discussed in Chapter 1, which found that Australian public relations practitioners were paid less than other professionals in the same organisations, and there were significant discrepancies in salaries along gendered lines (“PR industry at the Crossroads,” 1985). One practitioner reported their PRIA state council discussed “how can we make PR more attractive to young men, so they would … want to study PR” (Tymson). Another participant was told, in a phrase that echoes Rea’s (2002) words, that women “are pouring out of the universities” into public relations (Participant 10) and Anderson noted “how many more women were coming into communication public relations courses than males, because it was not seen as a high-paying career track for young males.” Tymson described how these concerns dominated discussions at the PRIA (NSW) state council in the 1980s:

So most of the guys were ex-journalists, and not a lot of women went down that track. But once the graduate courses became available, they were predominantly 96% women doing the courses, and no guys. And it did become an industry problem, it became a major industry problem, and one that was discussed at many meetings. … It was just a reality that we all felt that an industry run just by women would be perceived as like childcare and nursing.

4 In contrast, Turnbull argues that feminisation in the Australian public relations industry was unusual in that “wages and salaries increased, rather than decreased” and “the glass ceiling doesn’t seem to exist” (2012, para. 7), although Turnbull cites no source to support this statement. Turnbull makes a similar argument in his self-published memoirs, drawing on his personal experience (see Turnbull, 2010, p. 26).
The industry response to the growing feminisation of public relations was to develop greater regulation of professional structures designed to demarcate professional public relations from non-professional activity and ensure greater exclusivity among its membership. Significant stratification emerged along gendered lines between technical (non-professional) and strategic or professional activities in public relations, and across different sectors (Fitch & Third, 2010, 2014). Women, for example, were more likely to enter public relations through promotional activity and from not-for-profit and marketing sectors than from journalism (Fitch & Third, 2014). Despite the increase in the number of women working in public relations, women were more likely to remain in certain sectors such as community relations and not-for-profit and in low level, technical roles such as marketing and promotion; women were often excluded from more strategic public relations activity and found it difficult to advance within corporate structures (Fitch & Third, 2014).

The significance for this study is the industry’s ambivalent attitude towards higher education. On the one hand, as discussed in the previous section, university education was perceived to enhance the professional standing of public relations and reposition it as a management discipline. On the other hand, participants identify the introduction of university-level public relations courses resulted in large numbers of female public relations graduates, posing a threat to the professional standing of the field. University education therefore was perceived by participants to play a pivotal role in both the positive outcome of developing professional standards, but also, less favourably, in the feminisation of the public relations industry. The increasing regulation of PRIA membership, although an important part of ensuring professional standards and maintaining a jurisdiction over the industry, can therefore also be seen in part as a response to the professional anxiety evoked
by the rapid feminisation of the field (Fitch & Third, 2010, 2014). At the same time, female participants found the PRIA offered excellent opportunities for professional networking. Yorke, for example, joined the PRIA in 1984 precisely because “the state members of the PRIA were definitely working to make it a more professional career path and a better recognised part of the corporate business.”5 Similarly, Participant 9 noted: “you got involved in that kind of professional circle which was good because you didn’t have your own personal network of women because there weren’t that many women.”

As discussed in Chapter 1, and, as I have argued elsewhere, the rapid feminisation of public relations challenged the professional status of public relations sought by the PRIA in the 1980s and contributed to the perceived need for greater industry regulation and the introduction of a number of professionalising strategies (Fitch & Third, 2010). Public relations offered a pathway into management careers, particularly in certain sectors such as government and consultancy, for women with a university education (Fitch & Third, 2010, 2014). Therefore, it is significant to draw on previous research into feminisation and professionalisation of public relations in Australia, but with a focus on the role of higher education. Gender was identified as an issue in the Phase 1 interviews as the tertiary courses attracted more women than men. Participants identified the gendered environments in which they worked as public relations practitioners, and suggested high profile women in the industry I should consider interviewing. A significant finding of my investigation of feminisation and professionalisation in the Australian public relations industry was that higher education was perceived by all participants to have played a significant role in both these processes (Fitch & Third, 2014).

5 Yorke was admitted as an associate member in 1984 when she was working at Eric White Associates in Perth, WA (“Welcome to Eight,” 1984).
PROFESSIONALISING PUBLIC RELATIONS

PRIA accreditation of university courses. As discussed in previous chapters, the introduction of a national standardised accreditation program for university courses confirms that the PRIA considered university education essential for professional recognition. Putnis, as head of communication and media studies at Bond University in Queensland, worked closely with the NEC in 1991 and 1992 over the accreditation of the university’s public relations course in the first round of national accreditation. He confirms the active involvement of the PRIA in higher education and the need for universities teaching public relations to engage with the PRIA:

Pains were taken to secure accreditation right … it was always a good idea to try to get involved with the PRIA and, if possible, hire some staff who were active in the PRIA, perhaps just part-time staffers, and things like that, to try to develop that relationship.

From Putnis’ perspective, the relationship with the PRIA was significant and stronger than relationships with other industry sectors such as journalism and advertising. Putnis cites journalism, as a highly unionised sector with well-established industry cadetships, as having a difficult relationship with the academy. This observation is confirmed in Starck’s (1999) research, where he cites two former presidents of the Journalism Education Association; one stated “the industry and the union, in essence, did not appear willing to allow the universities to retain genuine autonomy in the design of their teaching programs” (Richards, 1998, as cited in Starck, 1999, p. 27) and the other, that “employer and union groups appear to have washed their hands of it [accreditation]” (Patching, 1997, as cited in Starck, 1999, p. 27). In contrast, Putnis perceived the PRIA’s accreditation process, at least in the early 1990s, as “a co-operative endeavour” between the industry and universities in
that the PRIA requirements were “flexible” compared with established fields such as psychology: “the Public Relations Institute … favoured a fairly broad, liberal education with only, let’s say, a quarter of the subjects in a degree specialising in public relations.”

Anderson, as NEC chair, confirms Putnis’ recollections of the PRIA’s emphasis on a broad liberal education and a degree of flexibility in terms of how the universities developed the course. As one example, Anderson stated in her interview in 2011 that in relation to the initial accreditation round, the NEC expected public relations courses to vary depending on their location (for example, a public affairs focus in Canberra, the federal capital; a mining and resource sector focus in WA; and a tourism focus in Queensland).

Public Relations Education

**Perceptions of public relations education.** Public relations education was perceived by participants involved with the PRIA’s accreditation processes as integral to raising industry standards and establishing public relations as a profession. However, participants also revealed mixed attitudes towards the value of university education. For Potts, public relations education offered the opportunity to reposition public relations and distinguish it from journalism, perceiving that through education the industry could “break the nexus between publicity and public relations.” Another participant, who established a consultancy in 1994 and was university-educated, sought to employ “arts graduates and if they’d done philosophy and politics, we thought they were wonderful,” as they could “think logically” and “argue a case” (Participant 10). However, as an employer running a public relations consultancy from 1983 to 1992, Tymson preferred employees with life experience, which she perceived lacking in university graduates: “to be honest the
graduates were getting paid too much, for a total lack of experience.” Similarly B. Mackey preferred university graduates work in another field before he would offer them employment in public relations, noting that graduates lacked “work skills.” Tymson, who did not have an undergraduate degree but had entered public relations through secretarial and promotional roles in 1969, acknowledged university education became the baseline entry requirement into public relations careers, particularly with the introduction of a PRIA-accredited university degree or a practitioner examination in 1985 as a condition for professional-grade PRIA membership. She expressed concern about the suitability of higher education as preparation for a public relations career as: “most university courses are too much theory and not practical.” Indeed, Tymson, who served as a state president and national PRIA president in the 1980s, describes her sense of being an “imposter” in a field where university education was becoming the normal entry route to the field. Tymson taught in the TAFE, rather than the university, sector and wrote a textbook in 1987 (Tymson & Sherman, 1987), which was widely adopted in university courses. The book, now in its fifth edition, is still in print, with the most recent edition published in 2008 (Tymson, Lazar, & Lazar, 2008). Despite her longstanding and successful career in public relations without formal post-secondary education (although Tymson completed a Master’s course in the 1990s), Tymson recognised that expectations were changing significantly for entry-level positions in the public relations industry.

This theme, that is a tension between public relations practice and theory, is prominent in many discussions around public relations education. It also emerged out of

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6Tymson Communications still exists, but in 1992, Tymson shifted her focus to public speaking, education, and training (see www.linkedin.com/pub/candy-tymson/0/11/43b). In contrast to Tymson’s assertion regarding public relations graduates being overpaid, the 1985 findings in the Chanmac Services report noted the increasingly tertiary qualified public relations workforce had lower salaries than other business functions and disciplines (“PR Industry at the Crossroads,” 1985).
the analysis of the Anderson archives, discussed in the previous chapters. It is worth noting
the concerns often emerged from understandings about the readiness of public relations
graduates to enter the public relations workforce, or their capacity to perform public
relations work, suggesting that public relations university education was conceptualised as
training. Quarles recalls working with the RMIT’s industry advisory committee in the early
1990s: “people in Victoria were very vocal about how the students needed to be prepared,
and we met that too … they wanted us to be teaching the practical things.” Even
participants, who fully supported public relations in higher education, suggested university
learning could not substitute for industry experience. For example, Potts stated “people
teaching public relations have got to keep their feet on the ground and keep in touch.” He
explained:

What I’d like to see is appointments to the teaching staff of more people who have
also had work experience in the field, not sort of university home-grown people
who really teach from a book. I don’t want to be unkind to teaching staff but I think
it’s very necessary in our field to have been at the coalface in a responsible position
and with a wide range of practice experience. It’s like a doctor: I mean you can’t
have a doctor teaching another doctor how to take out an appendix if they
themselves haven’t taken out an appendix.7

This emphasis on practical experience, either as general life experience or as an industry
apprenticeship, informed public relations education and almost certainly contributed to
expectations about the need for work experience in degree courses and high levels of
industry engagement by universities, as well as the role of the course advisory committees

7 Potts drew a near-identical analogy in his speech to the PRIA College of Fellows in 2008,
when he said: “Would a medical faculty allow a lecturer to teach medical students about ripping out
an appendix, or setting a fractured limb if that lecturer had never done so in real life?” (2008, p. 7).
in ensuring universities understood and met industry needs. As noted in the previous chapter, the requirement that graduates of accredited degrees complete two-years fulltime work as practitioners before becoming professional-grade members, introduced in the PRIA (1996) course accreditation criteria, highlights the industry perception that only industry experience – as opposed to university learning – could sufficiently socialise and develop public relations practitioners for professional practice. Indeed, practitioner contributions to student learning were reported in PRIA (WA) newsletters with titles such as “Students Get to Grips with the Real World” (1989) and nearly a decade later, as “Mentoring Vital for Student Learning and Development” (1998), suggesting the need to develop in students through industry experience an understanding of professional practice, or public relations expertise.

Some educators acknowledged resistance to scholarly approaches among practitioners, particularly as senior practitioners perceived they – and not educators – were the public relations experts. S. Mackey, who completed a PhD in 2001 after first enrolling in early 1991, identified a significant mismatch in interests between one practitioner and educators in the early 1990s when he attended PRIA state council meetings:

I was saying things like … the sort of [economic] environment that we’re in at the moment makes public relations important for this, that and the other and the chap said something like you must be a greenie, you talk about the environment all the time.

While S. Mackey is careful to attribute this sentiment to “some of the more mature people from the industry … on the PRIA council at the time,” the comment suggests significant scepticism on the part of the senior practitioner towards academia.
Transitioning from practitioner to academic. Few participants who taught in universities in the years 1985–1999 had a traditional path into academia, as primarily their industry experience constituted the grounds for their appointment and their suitability to teach public relations. Putnis had a traditional academic background, but was not a public relations educator. Quarles was the only participant in this study who held a doctorate at the time of her appointment in 1989 to a public relations educator position at an Australian education institution. Several participants described their lack of academic qualifications for appointment to lecturing positions. For example, Potts describes himself as: “an accidental academic” when he started teaching at Mitchell College in 1971, noting “other academics working with me … were looking a little bit askance at me—here was this upstart in the PR field who’s got no academic qualifications.” While Potts’ first appointment to an academic institution was in the early 1970s, two decades later, many of the public relations educators were still employed on the basis of their industry experience rather than formal academic qualifications. Most, though, had at least a bachelor-level qualification (Quarles & Potts, 1990). S. Mackey, who was appointed to a lecturing position in 1990 and had a Master’s degree in sociology and social policy, nevertheless perceived he lacked academic credentials and this perception resonated throughout his career, even after gaining a PhD in 2001:

> The way I see this whole area is I’m still trying to … become a pukka academic …

> I got my job as a pretend academic. I got my job because I had the vocational background and I had a bit of an academic fig leaf which was my masters.

Similarly, Participant 4, who was an associate professor who had taught public relations for

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8 This trend continues in the 2000s. I started teaching in a university in 2001, and was appointed to a fulltime lecturing role in 2003. My qualifications were a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) and industry experience.
over a decade before enrolling in a PhD, acknowledged: “I always felt a little inadequate and probably if I’d been from a more theoretically accepted field I may not have needed to prove myself.” As such, there is a strong sense in participant perceptions of public relations struggling for academic legitimacy.

As head of department at Bond University and later school dean and pro-vice chancellor at the University of Canberra, where he moved in 1996, Putnis acknowledged that the expectations for academics teaching in professionally-oriented fields such as public relations in the 1990s were unrealistic.

Universities wanted everything. They wanted people with extensive professional experience in these areas, yet they also wanted these people to have PhDs and they also wanted these people very soon after to develop research records of a … high standard. Well in my view this was an impossible ask of people … and quite a few people didn’t continue in the university context.

Echoing Putnis’ remarks, several educator participants noted heavy teaching workloads combined with expectations around ongoing industry engagement impacted on their capacity to develop as researchers and scholars. Typically, educators who worked in academic institutions, such as Synnott and Smith who commenced at WACAE (later ECU) in 1990 and 1994 respectively, commented they simply had “no time for research” (Smith). Synnott, for instance, was the sole public relations educator for a course still in development (“Gae Takes Charge,” 1990). As discussed in Chapter 2, communication studies courses in the late 1980s and the 1990s in Australia experienced significant growth in student numbers (Putnis & Axford, 2002). Drawing on his research into PRIA-accredited education in the late 1990s, Starck reported that individual educators were responsible for
“anything between 400 and 650 students” (1999, p. 122). The demands of developing new courses were all consuming, and Synnott described her workload following her appointment to WACAE in 1990:

When I arrived they had taught the first two units. I was faced with students going into second year—I had unit outlines, nothing developed in terms of course notes and I had new students coming into first year and so [I] was developing lecture notes and course materials, and the next year obviously I had students going into third year for the first time. I was the sole member of staff in the public relations program and was continuously doing a lot of course work development along the way, as well as teaching, developing evaluation frameworks, marking, seeking accreditation.

In part, the initial lack of emphasis on academic scholarship can be attributed to the location of public relations in second-tier institutions: the former CAEs and institutes of technology, where the emphasis on vocational courses and education often meant research was not a priority (Fitch, 2013a). The Western Australian College of Advanced Education (WACAE), for instance, was formed in 1982 out of the merger of several teaching colleges; it was granted university status on January 1, 1991, when it became ECU. University status meant, of course, that expectations of research and scholarship increased. Smith described how his teaching left little time for research:

So it’s been a sore point with me and with the university I think really, they would have liked me to publish but I honestly didn’t have the time or the energy. It was all going into teaching and rewriting as we went.
Putnis started his academic career at Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education in 1976.\(^9\) According to Putnis, the colleges and institutes, which formed out of the expansion of the Australia higher education sector in the 1970s and 1980s (as discussed in Chapter 2), aimed “to be more contemporary in their approach … more innovative, flexible, more vocational.” The situation was unchanged fifteen years later, when, S. Mackey, who was appointed to the Warrnambool Institute of Advanced Education in 1990, described public relations as “a nice sexy vocational subject which the proper universities are turning their nose up at so we [places like Warrnambool] can score on this level.”\(^{10}\) He notes “the major universities didn’t have much to do with public relations’ and the less elite institutions “were trying to take on more marketable courses where they felt that they could compete against major universities.” Even with the shift to university status following changes in government policy, as discussed in Chapter 2, a hierarchy persisted between established and newer universities, with the latter reliant on attracting students through the development of niche degrees and new markets (Fitch, 2013a, Marginson & Considine, 2000; Raciti, 2010).

The emphasis on teaching in the newer education institutions contributed to the lower status of these institutions in comparison to the elite, research-intensive universities. Putnis acknowledged “research careers suffered” in teaching institutions and “it was very difficult to re-orient towards more active research when these places became universities.” However, educator experiences of research varied. Three educators interviewed in this study enrolled in doctorates in the 1990s while teaching, after developing courses and even

\(^9\) Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education became the University of Southern Queensland in 1992.
\(^{10}\) Warrnambool Institute of Advanced Education became part of Deakin University in 1990, shortly after S. Mackey’s appointment.
reaching relatively senior levels within universities. For example, Synnott, who was employed as a senior lecturer and course coordinator in 1990, enrolled in doctoral studies after several years of teaching. Synnott described what a PhD meant for their ongoing employment.

They [the university] said … you've got to do a doctorate. Up until that point I’d been able to say well actually this is a new area and very few of the academics in Australia have a doctorate and if you were to go out to try to find someone else to fill that position you wouldn't find anyone with a doctorate because they’re just not around.

However, after an extended leave of absence and successful completion of a doctorate, Synnott chose not to return to academia except to teach international courses part-time for another institution, the University of South Australia, in the late 1990s. S. Mackey’s initial appointment in 1990 was made on the basis of his industry experience and his Masters qualification, but he acknowledged there was a clear expectation he would enrol in a PhD. S. Mackey perceived research was important for public relations educators: “in order to do the job properly,” noting that when he started teaching in 1990:

there was a divide between the empirical business studies approach of public relations coming out of America and … a critical studies background approach to communication … informed by the European cultural studies … but … I think that’s changing a bit now.

In terms of how his research informed his teaching or the public relations curriculum, S. Mackey acknowledged a split. He described teaching as his “day job, which is empirical,” and “it’s rare that what I teach is informed by what I’m publishing.” Given the earlier
discussion regarding the separation between practice and theory, it is significant Mackey perceives a similar division between his teaching and his research.

**Practitioner perspectives and the curriculum.** Many practitioners taught in universities in the 1980s and 1990s, frequently offering guest lectures or being involved in other ways. B. Mackey, who chaired the state tertiary liaison committee in the late 1980s, describes the PRIA state council requesting practitioners to do up to eight guest lectures a semester: “there was probably somebody from the PRIA there [at a university] every week … Of course in those days practically nobody had degrees.” B. Mackey, who did not have a university education, taught evening seminars twice a week and a whole semester when one lecturer was away. He also described frequent requests from university lecturers to the PRIA state council for case studies and other material for use in teaching. In contrast, one participant in another state, who taught in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, recognised limitations in using practitioners in teaching:

I … would have as much as I could people working in the field to come and teach but quite often, because they had no theoretical understanding of anything, it was a matter of guest lecturing rather than running a course. (Participant 4)

Often practitioners were appointed to lecturer positions, although after a few years, many chose to return to industry practice. S. Mackey recalled several industry people employed at Deakin University who returned to industry after a short time, noting they lacked “the dedication to the learning and scholarship side of thing” and, referring to financing travel to academic conferences, suggested “they’ve felt it’s a bit of an imposition on them that they have to put their hand in their own pocket … to develop their own academic career.”

Similarly, Putnis described one practitioner, a PRIA state president, who graduated with a
Master of Arts in Communication Management in 1995 “and then was appointed as an Assistant Professor in public relations … he didn’t remain an academic … he went, after a few years, back into industry.” Anderson described doing “ad hoc teaching all the time that I’ve been around here, always taking opportunities to go and talk and spend time with students,” in her various roles in the PRIA throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In 2002, Anderson was formally appointed an adjunct lecturer at the University of Canberra, where she taught the Masters course.

Industry practitioners contributed extensively to public relations education, even if they were not formally employed as educators. Potts acknowledged the significant industry support even in the first decades of university public relations education: “the PRIA was thoroughly behind us … [and] the industry was becoming more aware of what academe could do to produce the future practitioners.” As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, PRIA members and state councils contributed to university-level public relations education through participating in industry or course advisory committees and accreditation review panels, facilitating work experience opportunities, giving occasional guest lectures, or sharing industry material for use as teaching resources.

Most educator appointments in the 1980s and 1990s were practitioners with limited, if any, tertiary teaching experience. As reported in Chapter 2, the typical Australian public relations educator profile in 1990 was professional experience in public relations and a Bachelor-level education (Quarles & Potts, 1990). Given the heavy teaching loads, it is worth considering the resources, such as textbooks, available for public relations educators. The influence of US public relations education, identified in previous chapters, was acknowledged by participants. US textbooks dominated the public relations textbook
market and all participants noted the lack of Australian textbooks. Quarles recalled students wanted more local material: “I saw the reaction from the students quite frankly. They were telling me we don’t want your US cases, we’re different.” Participants recalled textbooks they set in the 1990s, which generally were a mixture of US and – where possible – Australian books. Synnott, who became an educator in 1990, set Australian textbooks by Tymson and Sherman (1987) and Quarles and Rowlings (1993), alongside American textbooks such as those by Grunig (1992), McElreath (1993), and later, Wilcox, Ault, and Agee (1995). As reported in Chapter 4, Quarles and Potts (1990) stated the most common US textbooks set in Australian courses were Grunig and Hunt (1984)’s *Managing Public Relations*, Cutlip, Center, and Broom’s (1985) *Effective Public Relations*, and Cantor and Burger’s (1984) *Experts in Action*. Walker (1991), as editor of an inaugural newsletter for public relations educators, reported *Public relations as communication management* (Crable & Vibbert, 1986) was “particularly useful” but that it could only be purchased from the US as there was no Australian distributor. Other educators acknowledged difficulty in finding suitable textbooks. S. Mackey, who commenced teaching in Australia in 1990, adopted books on visual communication and desktop publishing for public relations courses. Putnis noted educators “used some of the standard American textbooks” as well as “more general communication textbooks,” citing his co-authored book, *Professional communication: Principles and application* (Putnis & Petelin, 1996), “which I know was used in some public relations courses.” As discussed in Chapter 2, following changes in government policy, universities were able to attract full fee-paying international undergraduate students from 1987, and increasingly in the 1990s, exported public relations courses to mostly Southeast Asian countries (Fitch, 2013a). It is worth noting that Starck
reports how one educator justified the use of an American textbook, “because of the need to service overseas students … the university reading lists ‘must not be too Australian’” (1999, p. 62). While this theme did not emerge in the interviews I conducted, it reflects a recent study by Toth and Sison (2011) that found internationalisation in the public relations curriculum is frequently a euphemism for Americanisation.

In addition to published books, educators relied heavily on resources generated by the public relations industry, or developed from educators’ professional experiences in industry or through their ongoing consultancy work. Given the expense of US textbooks, Smith chose to set fewer textbooks in the second half of the 1990s, drawing instead on “industry material and material we ourselves originated,” that is “not stuff that was published academically but stuff that we [practitioners] used.” Quarles noted she inherited a lot of “case studies and campaigns” from her predecessor at the university when she started teaching at RMIT in 1989. The PRIA (WA) state council worked closely with two universities, providing several practitioners to run “a day of workshopping PR case studies” (Synnott). As noted in Chapter 2, the PRIA (WA) state council, with the assistance of eight practitioners, organised two full-day workshops for approximately eighty students from two universities (“Student Workshop Gains,” 1989). These workshops began in 1989 and continued for some years. In 1996, PRIA (WA) called for practitioners to contribute examples of successful campaigns for use as teaching resources as part of a “classic case studies” project; ECU lecturer Ursula Kolecki was collating the resources as, according to the article, “almost all PR texts feature North American and British cases. Don’t you think it is a good idea that Australian students learn about Australian situations?” (“Wanted: Classic PR,” 1996).
The industry’s entries for the PRIA Golden Target awards were valuable teaching resources. In June 1991, PRIA (NSW) state councillor, NEC member and UTS senior lecturer, Gael Walker (1991) catalogued the award entries and distributed the catalogues to educators and PRIA state councils. In 1992, the PRIA made these catalogues available in the UTS library and for sale through the PRIA (“PRIA’s commitment to excellence,” 1992).11 Winning entries became a database for university educators, with Smith acknowledging “they became our local case histories” and were useful examples of best practice Australian case studies. For Potts, these resources were unique as in his view the Australian context differed “from the USA and Britain” and therefore “the PRIA’s Golden Target Awards case studies were invaluable.” Several participants, including academics and NEC members, described their involvement as judges for the PRIA’s Golden Target Awards in the early 1990s. Participant 4 perceived it as “education influencing industry” in a positive way and raising industry standards. They rewrote the criteria in 1990 to ensure consistency in judging, specifying that entrants articulate evidence of research, develop clear objectives and goals, provide budgets, and offer suitable evaluation to demonstrate objectives were met. In this way, the criteria ensured that the award entries were structured as professional narratives, conveying both individual agency and professional legitimacy (Pieczka, 2007). It also ensured their value as teaching resources, by structuring the case study in terms of widespread understandings of professional public relations activity. The textbooks, industry resources, and award entries, along with practitioners’ industry experiences, therefore informed the public relations curriculum. The values and expectations of industry are demonstrated through the extensive use of resources developed

11 Although Potts referred in his interview to his instigation of this collection, Walker is credited in the newsletter with establishing the resource (“PRIA’s Commitment,” 1992).
by practitioners and textbooks written by practitioners, rather than by academics, throughout the 1990s. That is, the Australian curriculum was shaped by an understanding of public relations knowledge constituted in industry practice and conceptualisations of public relations in US textbooks. As noted in Chapter 2, the Quarles and Rowlings (1993) textbook was unusual in that it was co-written by an academic – an American academic teaching in Australia – for the Australian market.¹²

**International teaching.** From the late 1980s, following the change in Australian government policy towards fee-paying undergraduate students in 1987 (as discussed in Chapter 2; see also Fitch, 2013a; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2005; and Raciti, 2010), participants identified growth in international markets and in the number of Asian students studying public relations education in Australia in the 1990s. Participants also taught public relations in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Vietnam, and travelled to India, China, and other countries in Asia to establish possible partnerships with local education institutions, offering advanced standing or negotiating articulation arrangements to encourage international students to study in Australia. These experiences are supported by evidence in the Anderson archives, particularly in relation to the second accreditation round (1997–2001), as reported in the previous chapter. Further reduction in government funding to Australian universities in 1996 accelerated the export of courses for delivery outside Australia as universities sought new revenue sources (Fitch, 2013a; Raciti, 2010).

¹² In his discussion of Australian public relations textbooks, Macnamara (2012) states that Johnston and Zawawi’s (2000) textbook is the first Australian textbook to be published since Potts’ (1976) edited book. However, Johnston and Macnamara referred to *Practising public relations* (Quarles & Rowlings, 1993) as “a solid hands-on, practical text which covered a wide range of topics—from law and ethics to employee and Aboriginal affairs” that “advance[d] the literature to the next phase, carrying with it the kudos of being university based” (2013, p. 5).
Participants increasingly taught internationally. Potts returned to CSU (formerly Mitchell College) in the second half of the 1990s specifically to develop public relations courses for delivery in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, acknowledging Australian and “overseas universities were marketing themselves heavily in Singapore.” Synnott also returned to academia on a part-time basis in this period to teach Australian university public relations courses internationally for the University of South Australia, while a third (Participant 4) taught internationally for two universities, while employed as a fulltime academic at another university. Putnis recalled Bond University, where he taught until 1996, did not teach in other countries, but “put a significant effort into offshore recruitment” and was “more reliant on international students than other Australian universities.” Putnis notes the 1990s were “a heyday [for communication studies] when our courses, our undergraduate courses here were extremely attractive to students in Singapore, particularly in advertising, marketing, communication areas.”

In addition to travelling overseas to teach, educator participants made links with professional associations and education institutions in countries in Asia, confirming the growing public relations industry engagement between Australia and countries in Asia identified in Chapter 5. For instance, Potts reported working closely with the Institute of Public Relations in Singapore and Putnis visited the equivalent institute in India as well as polytechnics and colleges in Singapore and Malaysia. In addition, four participants in this research (B. Mackey; Participant 6; Smith; and Yorke) worked in Asia as public relations practitioners. Smith described how his professional experience in Indonesia in 1979–1981 influenced his approach to teaching in Australia: “I realised that our future is in Asia and our future is as a multi-national country, part of Asia geographically.” However, there is
little evidence of the extent the Australian public relations curriculum may have been adapted for delivery in international settings or to diverse student cohorts, other than the inclusion of Asian case studies in the Quarles and Rowlings (1993) textbook.

In the previous chapter, I suggested that feedback to universities from PRIA accreditation panels in the second round (1997–2001) varied regarding the relevance of including material relating to public relations in Asian contexts. I asked in interviews with educator participants if they adapted the curriculum when teaching overseas. Putnis identified issues with significant amendments for local delivery, due to the need to ensure equivalence with the Australian degree. Potts identified challenges teaching internationally in accessing “good local case studies.” Participant 4, who taught postgraduate Masters courses for two Australian universities in Singapore and Hanoi, focused on “mak[ing] it relevant to their own work” as the students were industry practitioners. Quarles’ undergraduate qualification was in Asian Philosophy, and noting a “multi-ethnicity in my classes” when she taught at RMIT, stated she was “supersensitive” about incorporating global perspectives and using relevant materials and examples and recognised “there’s a whole world of ideas and different approaches, not just the western or US approach.” However, despite these observations, the PRIA accreditation processes focused on Australian public relations activity and on an Australian, rather than a regional, body of knowledge.

Public Relations in the Academy

**Disciplinarity and public relations.** In Chapter 2, I drew on Foucault to argue that education assists in the constitution of knowledge, and establishes disciplinary boundaries. The ways knowledge is organised into disciplines in the academy reveals how public
relations is understood within academic institutions in relation to other fields and the
development of its own disciplinarity. As I established in Chapter 2, since the 1970s in
Australian universities, public relations is most commonly associated with communication
studies, and less commonly with business studies in higher education.

In this section, I consider participant perceptions of the relationship of public
relations, as an emerging field of study in universities, with journalism, marketing, and
with “parent” disciplines in terms of its disciplinary home, in order to investigate both its
growing disciplinarity and alliances with other bodies of knowledge within the academy.

Public relations and marketing. Analysis of the interviews reveals diverse
attitudes towards marketing in the context of its relationship with public relations. Several
participants in this study resisted suggestions of an overlap between marketing and public
relations. As Smith acknowledged in his interview in 2011, “there are people still who
confuse marketing with PR.” Potts reacted strongly to my question about marketing
courses in the context of a discussion of public relations in Australian higher education in
1971:

Q Were there many marketing courses available in the higher education sector
at that point?

A That I can’t answer Kate with any authority but marketing, as you know,

isn’t public relations—it is only one element of the PR mix so I don’t know

how that relates to what we’re talking about.

Both Smith and Potts were keen to maintain public relations as a distinct discipline from
marketing. It is worth noting, given the earlier discussion in this chapter regarding the links
between feminisation and professionalisation, that participants observed women often entered public relations from marketing, where they gained a strong understanding of “customer relationships” and “consumer behaviour” (Participant 10). More broadly, and as I discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, the potential overlap between marketing and public relations was perceived by the public relations industry, keen to develop public relations as a distinct field of activity, as encroachment and threatened the development of public relations as a distinct discipline within the academy (see also Hatherell & Bartlett, 2006, and McKie & Hunt, 1999).

However, other participants in this study sought a greater integration between marketing and public relations education, confirming the findings reported in the previous chapter regarding industry concerns that public relations education should have a stronger marketing orientation in the second accreditation round (1997–2001). Putnis recounts developing a “somewhat hybrid’ Master’s degree in marketing communication in the mid-1990s,” acknowledging “it was … staking a bit of a claim for the communication area.” The degree was taught in several countries. Putnis stated he “didn’t realise that the whole issue of marketing communication was fairly sensitive,” and it was clear when the Grunigs toured Australia in 1996, they were “sceptical … of this … development in PR” and “wanted to maintain … [a] distinct PR identity.” I noted resistance to discussing marketing and indeed promotional activity or publicity in relation to public relations education in my field notes. Attempts to position public relations as a business management activity inevitably resulted in a suppression of links with publicity and promotion. As discussed earlier in this chapter, participants perceived the role of education as a key

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professionalisation strategy, promoting and developing public relations’ management links and business orientation.

**Public relations and journalism.** Several participants acknowledged a fierce resistance by academics in other fields to the introduction of public relations at their institutions, confirming the findings of studies reported in Chapter 2 (see, for instance, Maras, 2003, and Flew, Sternberg & Adams, 2007). Initially, this resistance was perceived to pit more traditional and scholarly disciplines against “vocational” fields, particularly in the mid-1980s. However, in the 1990s, tensions emerged between co-emergent fields such as journalism and public relations. Participant 4 noted other scholars “hated journalism until public relations came along” but then discussed their experience of opposition from journalism educators: “they had a mission in life to destroy public relations … they had no respect for public relations.” Public relations, at least at Participant 4’s university, suffered in terms of its academic legitimacy due to perceptions of its commercial or business orientation. While some participants acknowledged a rivalry with journalism, at many institutions journalism and public relations courses co-existed within the umbrella discipline of communication studies. Potts expressed concern about the ongoing association of journalism and public relations, primarily because, he argued, it prevented recognition of public relations as a unique discipline:

I’ve had this battle forever, the recognition. What is PR all about? Is it publicity, is it manipulating, is it lies? There’s always tension between the journalist lecturers and the PR lecturers and that still happens. It’s out of the misunderstanding of what PR should be about. I’m afraid that the industry has not done itself any favours by
continuing this nexus between journalism and PR. We’ve got to break away. I tried to create a distinct discipline out of public relations/communication.\(^{14}\)

Senior practitioners articulated a resistance to an association with journalism, ironically, especially the ex-journalists, many of whom were not university educated. For example, B. Mackey argued for the need to distance public relations from journalism and to develop a stronger commercial or business orientation in education, citing the corporate and business sectors as the most likely employers of public relations graduates. Senior practitioners, such as Potts and B. Mackey, therefore sought for public relations to establish itself as a unique and separate discipline from journalism and break any connection with public relations as media relations and publicity. As discussed in Chapter 1, similar concerns were expressed in trade publications and newspaper features in the 1980s (see, for instance, Dell’oso, 1983) and are reflected in PRIA archives, particularly in state and national council minutes in the 1990s.

**Business and communication studies.** The location of public relations within university faculties varied. As identified in Chapter 2, the majority of public relations courses in 1990 in Australia were located within communication studies rather than in business schools (Quarles & Potts, 1990). However, communication studies courses were variously housed in schools of arts, social sciences, or even communication. The introduction of increasingly niche degrees in the 1990s (see Appendix B: Growth in Australian accredited undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the 1990s) offers some evidence of the changes happening within universities as new schools were formed or universities restructured. Indeed, at ECU in 1998, the public relations team contemplated

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\(^{14}\) Similarly, Potts states “I look forward to the day when that nexus with journalism has broken” and that his preference is in the future public relations will be taught in business or management schools (as cited in Morath, 2008, p. 62).
moving from the arts to the business school as part of a major university restructure, but the course was eventually located in a new School of Communications and Multimedia. In response to an address from Curtin University lecturer, John Allert, at the PRIA (WA) state conference in September 1998, where Allert reportedly “implied that public relations should only be studied in a Faculty of Business” (Prodigy Executive, 1998), Hunt (1998), an ECU lecturer, argued that “the future of our world is Communications,” and the benefits of public relations’ “align[ment] with related courses, including interactive media; media studies; journalism; advertising; and photomedia.”

From the industry perspective, a stronger business orientation was perceived as one way to address the challenge of “feminisation” to the industry’s professional standing. Participant 9, for example, arguing that developing a stronger business sense in students, and teaching public relations as a business course, would assist in raising the standards of industry practice and avoid public relations being relegated to a support function. Such comments confirm the PRIA’s professional discourse and in particular a closer association with business and management was founded on a gendered segregation of technical and professional activity (Fitch & Third, 2010). However, not all participants agreed that public relations should be housed in a business faculty or taught as a business course. For example, Smith, who taught at ECU from 1994, valued the flexibility communication studies offered, particularly in relation to teaching the broader social and ethical implications of public relations.

Either you’re in the communications area or the business area and I bless the decision that was made to have us in the communications area here because it gives you much more flexibility about the university aspects of it, why we’re here, what
we’re doing and the morality of what we’re doing.

Synnott, who was also at ECU, acknowledged the tension between business and communication studies as disciplinary parents, citing her experience as an educator in 1990–1997, where:

I was in the Department of English and for all the time that I was there, there was a tussle about whether it should be in the English school or in the business school and my personal preference was business school but anyhow historically that's how it developed.

For Anderson, the faculty for public relations was not particularly significant, as she perceived value in public relations being located in business, arts, or social sciences faculties. Anderson noted:

We [the NEC] didn’t really ask any questions and didn’t say. There were some people who liked the idea of the Social Sciences, just to expand the thinking and others liked the cut and the thrust of the Business school … there was always a bit of a soft spot with me with Social Sciences because I did feel that it was expanding the thinking and pushing them [students] hard to think outside the square.

Nevertheless, Anderson believed students needed to understand business, which she described as essential “if you’re going to be working in any sort of business.” Participant 4 taught public relations in the late 1980s in a business school, but drew on a communication studies framework:

Public relations was in the context of communication studies. Now the kind of communication studies that was taught in those days was … interpersonal, organisational, small group, arguments and reasoning … For me it mattered a lot
that communication studies was the base. … it had great theory, because it was so closely aligned with sort of a type of psychology and very North American based I have to say, but there was a theoretical basis for so much that you did.

(Participant 4)

This participant acknowledged “some overlaps” with organisational communication, and indeed, the PRIA sought to accredit courses in public relations or organisational communication. In Chapter 2, I drew on Putnis to suggest the emergence of communication studies was pivotal to the introduction of public relations courses to the tertiary sector. In the interview for this research, Putnis suggested that the Australian model for communication studies was unique, in its combination “of professional specialisation with academic study of communication.” He acknowledged, however, “it was a model that was always full of tensions, but that’s part of the story.”

Implications For Public Relations Education

I presented in this chapter an analysis of interviews with prominent individuals associated with a professional institute, whose mission is to establish public relations as a management discipline and gain professional status. At face value, many participants offered strong “evidence” of the development of public relations from a publicity function to a profession. However, in my discussion of the use of interviews with elite participants in Chapter 3, I acknowledged the significance of subjectivity and retrospectivity in participant accounts. The profound influence of the dominant paradigm, which suggests an historical and progressive evolution for public relations from asymmetrical, unethical practice to ethical communication based on two-way symmetry between an organisation and its publics, has led to “eyewitness” histories of public relations that tell the same story.
Some participants identify themselves, and others, as key players in that story. The challenge for the researcher, therefore, is to recognise that the interview does not offer an objective and authentic rendering of history but may still offer rich and valuable insights and perspectives. Indeed, the foregrounding of public relations knowledge as constituted in practice, the positioning of public relations within a professional discourse, and the attempt to establish public relations as a unique field and as a business, management discipline distinct from journalism and marketing offer important insights for this study.

Practitioner understandings of public relations knowledge as constituted and transmitted in practice significantly informed public relations education. The need for a strong business orientation in public relations education was fuelled by a desire for the field gain greater professional recognition and management status. However, promoting public relations as a management discipline meant suppressing its links with publicity and promotion and ensuring it developed a unique identity from journalism (despite, or perhaps because of, the prominence of former journalists in the public relations industry and within the senior membership categories in the PRIA). The feminisation of public relations was perceived as a threat to the professional standing of public relations, but many participants considered university education could play a significant role in the recognition of public relations as a significant management activity (thereby countering the impact of feminisation). Ironically, university education was also perceived by participants to contribute significantly to the feminisation of the Australian public relations industry.

Like other vocationally oriented university courses introduced with the expansion of the Australian higher education sector in the 1970s and 1980s, a tension between the value of “practical” industry experience and scholarly knowledge emerged. The PRIA
sought to develop a unique identity for public relations within academic institutions, particularly through industry accreditation and increasing practitioner involvement in the education sector in the 1980s and 1990s. However, perceptions of the commercial orientation of public relations and its close association with the industry impacted on the capacity of public relations to gain academic status, confirming L’Etang and Pieczka (2006) and Hatherell and Bartlett (2006)’s findings. Several educator participants in this study noted they felt like “imposters” and unrecognised within the university environment, while other educators, along with several practitioners, expressed a concern that academic research and teaching lacked relevance for the industry.

Public relations struggled to find academic legitimacy within the university sector. Its disciplinary boundaries were fragile, and while most courses were housed within the broad framework of communication studies, alongside co-emergent fields of study such as journalism, advertising, and media studies, public relations met on occasion strong resistance from both more theoretical fields and from emerging fields such as journalism. Some participants preferred a business focus in public relations education. However, other participants found value in public relations being located within a communication studies or humanities faculty, rather than a business faculty. While practitioners remained concerned about public relations’ professional legitimacy, public relations experienced a relatively low status within the university sector with its location in second-tier institutions with their focus on teaching, its close industry links, and its success in attracting Australian and international students, thus generating new sources of revenue for universities. The location of public relations in the “new” universities also had an impact on the career
development of individual academics, and their capacity, or indeed the opportunity, to
develop as scholars.

The public relations curriculum was informed by these tensions. While perceptions
of the value of a broad, general education were prominent, the units which comprised the
“professional” public relations core were shaped by the industry’s professionalisation
drive. This constitution of public relations knowledge was drawn from values embedded in
industry practice and practitioner experiences. At the same time, the limited public
relations scholarship meant the dominant paradigm for public relations presented normative
understandings and framed public relations as a strategic, management field, despite the
fact that most courses in Australian institutions were situated within communication
studies. Even Participant 4, who initially taught public relations in a business school, taught
public relations within a communication studies framework. Student demand fuelled the
growth in these courses, and the expansion to international markets meant educators
developed courses for delivery in multiple countries or to diverse student cohorts in
Australia. Participants conceptualised Australian public relations as unique, perceiving the
US textbooks a poor fit with the Australian public relations industry. Perceptions of the
role of education varied between the development of future employees in the public
relations industry, which meant an increasing focus on business education over the course
of the 1990s, based on the professional drive for public relations to be recognised as a
business, management field, and in terms of a broad, general education, which some
participants valued as they perceived it developed critical thinking and analytical skills in
students, and improved their knowledge of Australian society.
Conclusion

This chapter presented perceptions from practitioners and educators who had different roles in relation to the development of public relations education in Australia. Their memories are retrospective and reconstituted through the lens of their earlier and indeed later experiences. Their narratives of Australian public relations education, particularly in relation to the 1990s, the decade the PRIA introduced a national accreditation program and the number of accredited courses doubled, situate public relations education within a professional narrative. That is, the constitution of public relations knowledge and the role of education are understood in terms of their significance for the industry’s professionalisation. The findings that emerge from the analysis of interviews offer additional insights into the processes, values, and interactions between industry and the academy, addressing some of the gaps and limitations of the archival research presented in the previous two chapters. These findings offer new perspectives of the ways in which public relations knowledge was constituted and indeed contested in Australia in recent decades.

These diverse perspectives on public relations education contribute to the development of critical insights. The first insight relates to jurisdictional issues and the ways in which the industry, through the PRIA, attempted to privilege certain narratives and constrain other narratives in relation to the development of both public relations education and a unique identity for the field. For example, participants articulated the need to separate public relations from an association with journalism, promotion, publicity, or even media relations, and to reposition public relations as a business management discipline (thereby countering perceptions of the significance of its feminisation and lack of professional
status). These conceptual understandings emerged in part from US scholarship and the dominant paradigm for public relations, which privileged professional understandings of public relations as a strategic, management discipline. The industry’s professionalisation drive resulted in a preference for an alignment of public relations with business in the academy, despite the siting of public relations mostly within communication studies and arts schools. However, other participants in this study preferred communications studies for public relations, perceiving value in a broad-based and general university-level education.

A related insight is the academic legitimacy of public relations. The location of public relations in mostly second-tier institutions and the lack of formal academic qualifications of public relations educators at the beginning of the 1990s had an impact on both the careers of individual academics and on the status of public relations within the academy. That is, a combination of its vocational orientation, industry links, and relative lack of academic scholarship meant public relations struggled to gain disciplinary status. Australian public relations was conceptualised by participants as unique; the experts, therefore, were senior practitioners with industry experience rather than international scholars. Educators sought industry support through the provision of industry resources for use in teaching, participation in education advisory committees, and occasional or part-time teaching. In addition, practitioner perspectives informed the development of the public relations curriculum through textbooks and through ongoing liaison with the PRIA state councils and education committees.

The third insight relates to perceptions of the role and value of public relations education. From the PRIA perspective, education was a key professionalisation strategy. It was perceived to develop a more rigorous approach to public relations practice and raise
industry standards and offer the professional legitimacy the industry sought. That is, from the practitioner perspective, education could usefully reposition public relations as a business discipline, address industry training needs, improve standards of practice, and counter the threat of its feminisation. However, some participants perceived university education did not develop work-ready graduates, suggesting graduates lacked practical skills. For universities, however, public relations education, along with other courses in communication studies, became an important source of revenue, particularly with the expansion into international markets.

The fourth insight to emerge from my analysis of interviews relates to the PRIA, and the significance of particular research methods for historical research. I note that all but one of the participants in this study are, or were, members of the PRIA and the use of snowball sampling in Phases 1 and 2 resulted in referrals to elite participants within the small network of professionals within the senior ranks of the PRIA. That is, the majority of participants in this study were part of an organisation whose mission was to establish public relations as a profession. The dominance of Potts, for instance, as PRIA’s National Examiner, as pioneer public relations educator, and as senior PRIA member is revealed in the retrospective accounts offered by other participants. Potts played a significant role in establishing professional structures in Australia, and his perspective significantly informed the perspectives of others. As such, it is not surprising that the dominant understanding of education that emerged constructs its role in developing the professional standing of the public relations industry. These findings nevertheless offer important insights into the role sought by the PRIA in the development of public relations education in Australia.
Chapter 7: Findings and Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the main findings emerging from this study. My focus on public relations education in Australia in the late 1980s and 1990s reveals the significant role education is perceived to play in the professionalisation of public relations. I present in this thesis evidence of the complex interplay of societal and structural factors, which contributed to the development of public relations education. Early in the project, I chose to avoid presenting a progressivist account of the development of public relations in Australia and to explore instead the contests around public relations knowledge as well as the influence of factors external to the PRIA that contributed to the institutionalisation of public relations in the academy. Drawing on critical public relations scholarship on professionalisation, disciplinarity, and history, I suggest that, from the perspective of an industry body seeking greater social legitimacy, public relations education is pivotal to the field’s professional project. That is, for the PRIA, public relations in higher education offers a means of regulating membership and maintaining jurisdiction over public relations activity and training.

At the same time, however, public relations education is subject to a number of influences, and its emergence as a course of study in higher education needs to be understood in a broader societal context. As such, I conclude education is a site of contest, and that this contest is significant for understanding contemporary discourses around public relations education. In particular, investigating the involvement of a professional association in education needs to be understood in terms of the constitution, institutionalisation, and transmission of public relations knowledge. From my perspective
as a public relations educator and scholar, such understandings potentially contribute to a
more critical pedagogy for public relations and challenge contemporary industry
perspectives on public relations education. This perspective also leads me to question the
role of the professional association in tertiary education.

This thesis aimed to investigate the role of public relations education in the
professionalisation of the Australian public relations industry. To consider the findings,
which emerge from the research reported in this thesis, this chapter is structured in four
sections. In the first section, I consider the role of public relations education, arguing that
university-level education was perceived by the PRIA to be pivotal in confirming the
industry’s professional standing. I acknowledge, however, public relations continues to
struggle for professional recognition. In the following section, I consider perceptions of
public relations education, suggesting that various understandings of “knowledge” and
“expertise” played out in informal and formal PRIA accreditation processes. I avoid a
simple polarisation between industry and academy perspectives as there was significant
movement between these roles in the first decades of university-level public relations
education in Australia. In the third section, I consider the significance of discourses of
professionalism for contemporary understandings of public relations and public relations
education. I argue these discourses promoted a conceptualisation of public relations
knowledge that was structured around serving organisational or clients’ interests and
contingent on Australian industry experience. In the final section, I discuss my
methodology and the use of archival research and interviews and reflect on the significance
of these findings for researching public relations history.
Public Relations Education and Professionalisation

Education and the professional project. I have framed this study within the body of work produced by L’Etang and Pieczka concerning the professionalisation of public relations. L’Etang recognised that education performs a number of functions, including defining public relations’ jurisdiction, developing the body of knowledge, legitimising the practice, and performing a gatekeeping function (2004, p. 187). Education is therefore critical to the professional project. Writing on the history of public relations in the UK, L’Etang notes the significance of the professional association, the IPR, for the development of public relations education, despite its “rather ambivalent relationship with education”; the professional institute craved the “respectability and status” they perceived education could provide, but “practitioners’ interest in education was purely instrumental” and concerned with suitable “training” (2004, pp. 218–219). I investigated how these ideas have played out in the Australian context, focusing on both participant experiences and understandings and archival research into the regulation of public relations education by the professional association.

As reported in Chapter 1, the PRIA identified a number of strategies aimed at developing the industry’s professional standing in the mid-1980s, such as raising industry standards, regulating individual membership through practitioner examinations, and standardising the accreditation of university courses. Education was perceived to play a key role in addressing concerns about the industry’s professional legitimacy and led the PRIA to commission a report into the state of public relations education in Australia in 1989. The Quarles and Potts’ report confirmed the need for university education to train public
relations students for the “communication management role” (1990, p. 1), and supported a
standardised approach to the industry accreditation of university courses.

The PRIA’s introduction of a national accreditation program led to tensions within
the PRIA and between universities and the PRIA around the breadth, content, and role of
public relations education. For some practitioners, the institutionalisation of public
relations knowledge was problematic, and senior PRIA members expressed increasing
concern in the 1990s about the failure of universities to meet industry expectations and
needs. For example, in Chapter 6, I identified a recurrent theme, which emerged in my
analysis of practitioner and educator interviews, is the need for educators “to stay
grounded” and ensure public relations education is “relevant” to industry. In addition, as I
reported in Chapter 5, senior practitioners, in particular, the PRIA’s College of Fellows,
wanted greater recognition from universities regarding their unique expertise in public
relations in Australia. As one example, following the loss-making tour of James and
Larissa Grunig in 1996, the Fellows reported to the board they could present national tours
rather than bring in international scholars. As such, not only is public relations expertise
defined by the Fellows’ perceptions and experiences of public relations, but in the
Australian context, this localised professional knowledge is deemed by senior PRIA
members to be at least as, if not more, valuable than that of visiting international
academics. These findings confirm considerable resistance towards scholarly learning
among some senior practitioners. It also points to a conceptualisation of public relations
knowledge that is uniquely Australian and embedded in Australian industry practice. I
discuss this theme below.
Feminisation, education, and the professional project. Concerns over the professional standing of public relations were exacerbated in the 1980s by the growing feminisation of the industry. As reported in Chapters 1 and 6, by the early 1980s, women comprised 50 per cent of the public relations workforce (Zawawi, 2009). There was widespread industry concern that a feminised workforce would devalue the work of public relations and dash attempts to establish itself as a profession. As I have noted elsewhere, the increase in the number of women working in public relations resulted in a gendered stratification of public relations work, between professional and strategic management activity and non-professional, technical activity such as publicity and promotion (Fitch & Third, 2010). In addition, certain sectors – in particular corporate communication and public affairs – were more conducive to the development of the careers of male practitioners (Fitch & Third, 2014). These findings confirm the findings in studies in other countries, that is, female practitioners were more likely to work in particular sectors and the numerical dominance of women influenced and even constrained understandings of public relations as professional work (see, for example, Fröhlich and Peters, 2007, and Tsetsura, 2010). It is beyond the scope of this thesis, but clearly more work is needed to understand the significance of gender for public relations, given the continuing numerical dominance of women in the industry and the ongoing pay gap between male and female practitioners.

Education played a particular role in the feminisation of the industry. As noted in Chapter 6, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, female students made up 80% or more of Australian public relations courses (Quarles & Potts, 1990; “PR Education,” 1997; Rea, 2002). In the previous chapter, I reported participant recollections of discussions at PRIA council meetings in this period: that women “were pouring out of universities” and the
subsequent devaluing of public relations was “a major industry problem.”Ironically, while public relations offered, at least in some sectors, opportunities for women to progress and had lower barriers to entry than more established professions (Gower, 2001), it was precisely its feminisation which contributed to the introduction of more exclusionary and demarcatory strategies by the PRIA (Witz, 1992; Fitch & Third, 2010). These strategies included the creation of stricter requirements for professional-grade membership in 1985, from which senior PRIA members were later exempted, and the creation of the the College of Fellows in 1987. On the one hand, the inclusion of public relations in universities was perceived to strengthen public relations’ claim for professional recognition and to improve industry standards; on the other hand, the popularity of these courses among women and the subsequent feminisation of the field were perceived to threaten its professional standing, resulting in lower salaries and status. The PRIA’s introduction, then, of a number of strategies in the mid- to late 1980s aimed to confirm the professional standing of public relations in part as a response to concerns over the field’s feminisation. The greater regulation of public relations education by the PRIA and increasing attempts in the 1990s to align public relations with business or management disciplines in the academy were a response to anxiety about the field’s professional standing, exacerbated in part by the increase in women working in the industry.

Industry and the academy. The research reported in this thesis offers new insights into the development of public relations education in Australia. Rather than presenting the institutionalisation of public relations education in universities as evidence of the ongoing professionalisation, or “coming of age,” of the public relations industry, I drew on research into the massification and subsequent marketisation of the Australian higher education
sector to suggest that the introduction of public relations courses was in response to
government policy changes and the expansion and, in tandem, increasing vocationalisation
of the higher education sector. That public relations was introduced into, and became
established in, lower ranked institutions, more reliant on market demand (through offering
new and diverse courses and attracting international students) and more focused on
vocational education and applied research than established and higher status universities is
significant. It contributed to public relations’ struggle to develop academic legitimacy and
professional recognition and, as discussed in Chapter 6, had implications for the
development of the careers of public relations educators in that teaching loads were high
and expectations of scholarly work were low.

The vocationalisation of higher education changed the relationship between
industry and the academy. My findings suggest that at least until the early to mid-1990s in
Australia, and in some instances in the late 1990s (notably Potts and Synnott who
transitioned back and forth between practitioner and educator roles), in contrast to the
findings reported in van Ruler’s (2005) study, the boundaries between practitioner and
educator roles were fairly permeable. Both educators and practitioners served various and
often multiple roles with the professional association; many educators were appointed in
universities on the basis of their professional experience and some continued to consult
while working in academic institutions. Others transitioned back into industry roles.
However, in my analysis of the Anderson archives and interviews, I identified a shift in the
second half of the 1990s. The increased availability of postgraduate and Masters-level
public relations degrees meant that over the course of the 1990s, public relations educators
were more likely to have a Master’s qualification, in comparison to the start of the decade
when a Bachelor degree was typical. Three participants completed PhDs in this decade. In addition, more critical public relations scholarship, informed by scholarship outside the dominant paradigm, began to emerge. Despite resistance to the introduction of public relations courses by academics in co-emergent fields such as journalism, communication studies did offer public relations a disciplinary home in the Australian academy and the opportunity to present and publish research through ANZCA conferences and journals. In this decade, public relations began to develop greater academic legitimacy in that its senior educators gained more formal academic qualifications, and, in tandem, public relations became increasingly recognised within the academy as a legitimate field for scholarship.

The industry regulation of public relations education in Australia was subject to a number of jurisdictional challenges. I offered evidence in Chapters 1 and 2 of other professional associations, namely the AJA, the Australian Institute of Professional Communicators, Australian Centre for Corporate Public Affairs, CAMSA, and the Society of Business Communicators, seeking to accredit or endorse public relations courses or to represent public relations practitioners. It is not surprising the PRIA reacted strongly, given its professionalisation agenda dictated that it regulate the training of public relations practitioners and maintain jurisdiction over public relations activity in Australia. However, the internal structure of the PRIA also contributed to challenges in the regulation of public relations education. The state-based structure of the PRIA proved problematic in the attempt in 1991 to impose standardised, national accreditation criteria on university public relations education, where previously states had responsibility for accrediting, or at least endorsing, courses. As I have shown in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, tensions between state councils and the national body in the 1990s exacerbated concerns over the accreditation of
university courses. The power struggle between the PRIA state councils and the national body meant in some cases discussion and disputes over public relations education played out against a backdrop of existing tensions between state and national councils and contributed to resistance in some states to what was perceived as “the national agenda” or even “the academic agenda.” In addition, the College of Fellows was critical of university-level public relations education and sought greater involvement in the transmission of public relations knowledge.

Public Relations Education and Knowledge

**Disciplinarity and academic legitimacy.** With the introduction of public relations to the higher education sector, attempts to develop its disciplinary status and establish its academic credentials met strong resistance from more traditional scholars and, on occasion, co-emergent fields. In Chapter 2, I drew on Foucault (1972) to define a discipline as the way in which knowledge is organised and structured and argued, therefore, that the “unique intellectual structures and institutional flows” (Flew, 2010, p. 6) that contribute to the constitution of public relations knowledge are a significant area for research. Foucault’s work also informed the historical investigation I undertook in that it enabled the development of a critical history that considers how discourses continue to inform the present. My analysis confirms industry understandings of public relations knowledge as largely experiential and produced through practice. I argue that the 1990s is a significant decade for the public relations discipline in Australia. Following a significant increase in student numbers in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Australian universities introduced new undergraduate and postgraduate public relations degrees. The *Australian Journal of Communication* published a special issue on public relations in 1997 and the first
Australian public relations journal, the *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal*, was launched at the end of the decade. The emerging disciplinary boundaries of the public relations, that is, the ways in which public relations knowledge was constituted and understood in the Australian academy were primarily as a communication, rather than a marketing or business, discipline.

Public relations met considerable resistance from both established and theoretical disciplines and from co-emergent fields, such as journalism. In addition, its perceived close ties with the industry contributed to the struggle to gain academic legitimacy. As I noted earlier in this chapter, it is significant, too, that public relations was taught in the newer institutions, which initially had lower expectations of research activity and focused primarily on teaching. These factors had ramifications for the disciplinarity of public relations and public relations struggled to gain academic legitimacy. Certainly, expectations that public relations course coordinators would hold senior positions in universities were reflected in the PRIA’s course accreditation processes throughout the 1990s; the NEC refused to accredit courses where the course coordinator did not hold a senior academic position and, even in 2001 at the end of the second five-year accreditation round, supported the appointment of a public relations lecturer to associate professor without a PhD.

As public relations emerged as a course of study in the massification and, in tandem, increasing vocationalisation, of the Australian higher education sector, it found a disciplinary home most commonly in communication studies alongside advertising, journalism, mass communication, and media studies. Communication studies was made up of diverse courses, offering both theoretical learning and preparation for professional
communication careers. This diversity meant communication studies itself struggled to gain academic legitimacy, despite its success in attracting students.

The introduction of large numbers of new courses in professional fields resulted in considerable competition and rivalry between co-emergent courses. There was a clear threat of encroachment with the emergence of courses such as marketing communication and organisational communication, which overlapped considerably with public relations. In addition, journalism, itself struggling for academic legitimacy, was threatened by public relations, which was perceived by journalism and other communication studies educators to be tainted by its commercial and business orientation. These other courses competed with public relations for students and for jurisdiction over the education and training of future communicators. In the university sector, there was some convergence between various “professional courses” as universities introduced common first year programs and shared units.

Nevertheless, communication studies offered public relations a disciplinary home. For example, the ACA (later ANZCA) conference legitimised public relations research in that it programmed presentations, and in response to lobbying by the NEC in the early 1990s, special streams and seminars for public relations educators. Therefore, despite challenges to the academic legitimacy of public relations, the findings reported in this thesis identify public relations’ disciplinary home in Australia was most commonly in communication studies programs. This alignment with communications studies is seldom acknowledged in the public relations literature; ironically communication studies scholarship acknowledges both the inclusion of public relations and related fields such as organisational communication and identifies considerable tension around their inclusion
(see, for instance, Flew, Sternberg & Adams, 2007, and Maras, 2003). However, the findings that public relations struggled for academic legitimacy, and competed with other emerging disciplines, confirm the findings reported in other studies (Fitch, 2013a; Hatherell & Bartlett, 2006; McKie & Hunt, 1999).

My analysis of the Anderson archives and interviews reveals a shift in the PRIA’s priorities for public relations education between the two accreditation rounds in the 1990s, as in the second round, the PRIA, through state education panels, increasingly sought for public relations courses to be located in business schools, to include more business and management content, and to be taught as a management discipline. According to some interview participants, as reported in Chapter 6, in this way, education could address the threat to its professional status posed by the rapid feminisation of the field. However, such calls to position public relations as a management function also echo US scholarship and conform to the dominant paradigm. In Australian universities, the majority of public relations courses were (and still are) located within communications or arts faculties, with only a small number located in business schools. Writing in relation to public relations education in the UK, L’Etang (2004) described such an alliance with business as overtly political and problematic, in that it pitted public relations against marketing. Further, research in public relations tends to be prescriptive in that it advocates public relations should be part of the dominant coalition and recognised as a strategic management function (L’Etang & Powell, 2013). Calls for a stronger alignment with marketing and business became more prominent in the PRIA’s second national accreditation round when the accreditation process was partially devolved back to state-based practitioner committees. Indeed, as public relations began to become better established in the Australian academy
within the broad disciplinary umbrella of communications studies, the industry, through the professional association, sought a reorientation with business and marketing disciplines.

**The Australian public relations curriculum.** Public relations courses in the 1990s in Australia offered an interdisciplinary and generalist education; for example, the Diploma of Arts at Mitchell College, introduced in 1971, combined subjects from established disciplines such as English, politics, and history with some business-oriented courses such as organisational studies or marketing along with public relations. Two decades later, the recommended guidelines in the first accreditation round (1992–1996), adapted from the PRSA guidelines, identify the need for public relations courses to cover writing, research, evaluation, strategic planning, management skills, internships, and business subjects (PRIA, 1991; Quarles & Potts, 1990). The NEC expected public relations courses to offer a broad, general education, with a professional core of public relations units making up no more than 25% of the degree; the professional core would address the specific industry requirements in relation to the development of public relations expertise. As I reported in Chapter 4, the units making up the professional core should be underpinned by “communication theory,” even as the NEC stated it did not matter if public relations was housed in a business, arts, or social sciences faculty and that PRIA accreditation should encourage “innovation.” This understanding of the public relations curriculum supported a generalist university education and allowed considerable flexibility around the course in terms of its disciplinary home and orientation, provided there was a professional core of public relations units supported by communication theory.
This commitment to a generalist university education shifted in relation to the second accreditation round (1997–2001). As I discussed in Chapter 5, feedback on university accreditation submissions from state-based education committees often focused on the perceived failure of courses to meet industry needs. One state panel, for instance, “expressed a concern that many graduates from all public relations courses do not have well-developed writing skills and that universities have a responsibility to meet industry requirements in this area.”¹ Other areas of concern were around applied research to assist practitioners in meeting business goals. Some panels identified the need for new units to cover government relations and organisational communication, and even rewrote or developed new course descriptions to ensure the curriculum offered what they perceived as appropriate preparation for future practitioners and employees. State panel members suggested suitable textbooks; these were most often US textbooks. In the second round, state panels rejected journalism units, and encouraged instead the inclusion of marketing and business units, deeming these subjects more suitable preparation for a public relations career. In contrast to the first accreditation round, the PRIA feedback to universities reflected a stronger functionalist orientation in that it was drawn from Australian industry conceptualisations of public relations knowledge and of the role of public relations education. Although this feedback emerged initially from the reviews of state-based panels, their recommendations were not contested by the NEC. In addition, state panels expected greater practitioner involvement in public relations education, in comparison with the first accreditation round.

In this thesis, I presented evidence, drawn from my analysis of the Anderson archives and interviews, of how the various tensions around diverging understandings of knowledge and a number of influences, including US public relations education, played out in the development of Australian public relations education. The continuing dominance of US public relations textbooks ensured that the dominant paradigm informed and indeed structured the Australian public relations curriculum, and participants acknowledged a significant debt to US public relations education and scholarship. At the same time, the US textbooks were perceived to be a poor fit for teaching Australian public relations but useful for teaching theory. The dominant paradigm, therefore, continued to structure conceptual thinking about public relations in Australia. However, emerging from my analysis of the Anderson archives and interviews is an understanding of Australia as a unique context in which to practise public relations. As such, expertise in Australian public relations was drawn from Australian industry experience and suggests the implicit recognition of an Australian cultural capital in the construction of the professional occupational identity. The majority of educators were employed on the basis of their industry experience gained in Australia. Given the lack of Australian research and textbooks, educators frequently resorted to industry case studies, particularly the Golden Target award entries, and material drawn from their professional experiences in their teaching. Australian textbooks were mostly written by practitioners and endorsed by the PRIA. Consequently, industry perspectives significantly informed the public relations curriculum, and were validated by PRIA demands for ongoing industry engagement through course advisory committees and other means.
Asian markets and Australian public relations education. Australia’s geographical location and trade links with Asia are significant for Australian public relations education, not least because various countries in Asia became important markets. With the Dawkins’ reforms in 1987, large numbers of international undergraduate students came to Australia, and later, in the 1990s, Australian universities increasingly offered their courses internationally (Fitch, 2013a). The growth in international student numbers, partly in response to the need for second-tier institutions to find alternative revenue sources, led to an active engagement with education institutions in various Asian countries including Singapore, Malaysia, India, Hong Kong, and Vietnam. Educators also made links with professional public relations associations in those countries. In this thesis, I have presented evidence of this engagement by educators, through adjunct appointments and invitations to speak at industry conferences in Asia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and increasingly in the later years in the 1990s, teaching Australian public relations courses in Asian countries. As I acknowledged in Chapter 5, the influence of Western public relations education in countries such as Singapore is well recognised (Sriramesh, 2004); however, the impact of this market-led demand on Australian public relations education has until now not been explored, other than through a small number of studies regarding the significance for the curriculum I identified in Chapter 2. It is becoming more common for Australian textbooks to include a chapter on public relations in Asia (see, for example, Stanton, 2009). However, the findings reported in this thesis confirm that the international market fuelled the growth in, and continues to sustain, public relations education in Australia but that such developments have had a limited impact on industry expectations of the Australian curriculum.
In terms of public relations education, analysis of the Anderson archives and interviews with practitioners and educators suggest some, albeit limited, awareness of the need to incorporate Asian public relations activity and intercultural competence into the public relations curriculum. However, these understandings were not widespread, and often extended to the addition of an Asian case study. The inclusion of Asian case studies, and a whole chapter dedicated to the need for intercultural competence in Australian practitioners, in the Quarles and Rowlings’ (1993) textbook was unusual. Significantly, understanding public relations activity in Asia did not form part of the formal, written PRIA accreditation criteria, but was noted in feedback offered to universities from the panels reviewing university submissions. However, particularly in the second accreditation round (1997–2001), the feedback varied between states and was inconsistent as to whether an Asian or more global focus was needed. Often, comments related to significant trading partners for Australia, which in the 1990s was Japan. In response to the increase in international students studying in Australia, PRIA state education committees expressed concern over the lack of English competency and requested universities provide additional language support for students of non-English speaking background. Both examples reflect concerns that education should train students to meet the demands of Australian employers. Despite evidence of significant transnational and regional public relations activity, the knowledge and competencies required to operate in the Asian region, or, indeed, in the broader global context, were not addressed in PRIA course accreditation, which focused primarily on a national curriculum. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the significance of Australian–Asian interactions in the historical development of the public relations industry in greater detail; however, it deserves further research.
The focus on public relations education meeting the needs of the national professional association points to the underlying assumption of Australian public relations as unique. In the 1980s, as I reported in Chapter 1, the national president made grand claims for Australian public relations in comparison to the UK and the US. In the 1990s, the PRIA refused professional-grade membership to a senior practitioner from overseas, until they gained local experience. Similarly, senior practitioners sought greater recognition for their expertise through involvement in tertiary education and in the visiting eminent practitioner program. As universities increasingly sought international students and exported public relations education, one university educator wrote to the NEC that Australia was a “regional leader” in public relations education. Resoundingly, the lack of uniquely Australian resources and textbooks was perceived by the PRIA, NEC members, and participants in this research as problematic and efforts were made to establish a database of Australian case studies, through the cataloguing of the PRIA’s Golden Target Awards, and to endorse Australian textbooks. While the widespread use of US textbooks was acknowledged as useful for theory, they were considered less useful in developing students as Australian practitioners. Attempts to define Australian public relations as advanced in comparison to the rest of the world suggests senior PRIA members sought to establish Australian public relations practice as unique and themselves as the experts and the repository of Australian public relations knowledge. US studies and resources framed and dominated the conceptualisation of Australian public relations, yet analysis of the Anderson archives and participant interviews point to a widespread recognition of their limitations in terms of Australian public relations practice. Comparison with practices in other countries, particularly in Asia, only served to establish the uniqueness and
“advanced” state of Australian public relations. This finding has significant implications for the constitution of public relations knowledge in Australia. It suggests that the drive to establish a clear occupational identity for Australian public relations, as part of the PRIA’s claim for social legitimacy, and, in turn, professional recognition, meant that an exclusionary identity was constructed. This identity was conceptualised as expertise gained in an Australian context, that is, as an Australian cultural capital founded on local networks and contacts.

**Discourses of public relations education**

The findings reported in this thesis demonstrate how a professional association produces discourses of professionalism that contribute to exclusionary processes of occupational closure. For public relations, these discourses aim to establish social legitimacy and to address concerns around their commercial and business orientation (Edwards, 2014; Pieczka & L’Etang, 2006). These discourses are significant for public relations education, which I identified in Chapters 1 and 2 as a key mechanism in professionalisation, in that education allows access to a discourse. I have investigated in this thesis how public relations knowledge or expertise is conceptualised by the professional association. I concluded the PRIA is not a monolithic entity, in that it is made up of competing factions and hierarchies. Nevertheless, through my investigation of formal and informal credentialling processes, I have shown how the PRIA sought to control the production of public relations discourse to determine what (professional) public relations is and what it is not. That is, the PRIA developed demarcatory and exclusionary strategies, and these strategies informed attempts to regulate the transmission of public relations
knowledge through the introduction of a formal accreditation program for university courses.

This research problematises public relations knowledge in order to understand how and why particular discourses of public relations, particularly in relation to education, became prominent. The findings lead me to question understandings of public relations knowledge that are underpinned by discourses of professionalism. As L’Etang and Powell note, “reference is often made to ‘public relations principles’ without these being interrogated for their status, articulation or justification [in] an historical pattern” (2013, p. 7). That is, the significance of interrogating knowledge structures is that it allows an understanding of how power is manifest through discourse. In this thesis, I have explored competing and dynamic conceptualisations of public relations knowledge within the PRIA and the industry and identified resistance by some practitioners and scholars to the institutionalisation of that knowledge in the academy. Indeed, managerialist understandings of public relations frame its knowledge in terms of meeting business objectives and its function in serving organisational interests. However, education systems can also function to maintain or interrupt discourse (Foucault, 1972). The institutionalisation of public relations in the academy contributed to the development of alternative conceptualisations of public relations that focused on socio-cultural, critical, and ethical perspectives, offered a critique of the role of public relations in maintaining social inequality and serving corporate interests, and fostered a broader understanding of public relations.

To illustrate the contemporary significance of this research, I note the pervasiveness of discourses of professionalism in contemporary industry discussions of public relations education. Industry leaders, for example, complain about university public relations
education, using the same discourses this research has identified in relation to the 1980s and 1990s. In this section, I offer two contemporary examples, reports of a panel discussion at an industry conference and proposed changes to the PRIA course accreditation criteria, to illustrate the significance of discourses around public relations education that emerged in earlier decades but continue to resonate. The research reported in this thesis highlights ongoing concerns by some practitioners that public relations is a strategic management discipline and therefore should be positioned as part of the dominant coalition.

The first example is a report in trade media regarding a panel discussion with directors of “Australia’s leading public relations agencies” at a recent conference, Commscon (Christensen, 2014a). Speakers included Michelle Hutton, CEO Edelman Australia; Kim McKay, Director, Klick Communications; Louise Pogmore, Head of PR, The Hallway; and Michael Pooley, General Manager, Sydney, PPR (Sydney) (see www.commscon.com.au for more information). In the online publication, Mumbrella, Christensen (2014a) reported the “bosses say they are unhappy with the … level of training in public relations offered by university courses” and that one speaker lamented the industry skills shortage and noted the need for “a broader understand [sic] of the marketing mix.” Hutton acknowledged that “she was increasingly looking outside traditional public relations for the right candidates.” Panel members wanted employees to have skills in data analytics, social media, creative, video production, and design, suggesting the expertise necessary for contemporary public relations practice is dynamic. Pooley noted that public relations “agencies are at the coal face and are seeing what is happening a lot more quickly” than universities. At this point, I question what is unique to public relations. Much of this discourse, despite the impact of social media, echoes the themes, I have explored in
this thesis. Even specific word choices, such as industry “at the coal face” echo Potts and privilege understandings of public relations knowledge and expertise derived in practice. More generally, the skills panel members seek in employees are wide ranging and by no means unique to public relations. Further, university education continues to be conceptualised as training, that is, in terms of the development of vocational skills. In part, this may due to the impact of social media and online communication on the public relations industry in that it is fundamentally transforming and redefining public relations practice.

The second example is an email, with the subject heading “Future of PRIA accreditation,” I received late in 2012 from the PRIA’s education officer. It outlined proposed changes to accreditation of university courses in Australia, subject to the ratification of the PRIA national board. The next accreditation cycle will commence in the second half of 2014 and a report, *Professionalism and standards: Public Relations Institute of Australia educational framework*, was published online by PRIA (2013b) in June 2014. The PRIA’s National Education Advisory Committee (NEAC), which replaced the NEC at the start of 2012, gained permission to use the Canadian Public Relations Society’s (2011) *Pathways to the Profession* report as the basis for this report (J. Kenny, personal communication, December 20, 2012). The new accreditation criteria constitute an update to the 1991 criteria; however, the emphasis remains on the role of education in ensuring professional recognition, with similar wording to the earlier guidelines such as ‘the constituted body of knowledge that is a prerequisite for professional practice’ (PRIA, 2014, p. 2). Given the research reported in this thesis, I find it curious that nearly twenty-five years after the introduction of national course accreditation and significant growth in public
relations scholarship and education in both Australia and the Asian region, the PRIA again
turns to a North American public relations association for guidance regarding its course
accreditation. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer an analysis of the Canadian
report, but I note it includes a review of the current PRSA guidelines. Further, the
opportunity to develop a uniquely Australian education framework that addresses both
regional considerations and recent scholarship is ignored. The PRIA education officer
pointed to likely changes in accreditation criteria, such as: “the inclusion of business
management and basic accounting subjects” (J. Kenny, personal communication,
December 20, 2012). Such expectations reflect ongoing concerns by some PRIA members
about university education and, at the same time, ignore the alignment of public relations
education in Australia primarily within communication, rather than business, faculties.
Instead, the desire for public relations to be recognised in the boardroom, that is, as a
strategic management function, continues.

Both these examples illustrate how concerns that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s
continue to resonate in industry and professional association attitudes towards public
relations education. I am keen to avoid over-simplistic, binary oppositions between practice
and theory and between industry and academy, particularly as I have identified that the
positions of practitioner–educator–scholar are not fixed. But in interrogating existing
knowledge structures, I reveal how public relations education is understood in terms of
both providing a public relations workforce and defining what public relations is. The
information from PRIA’s education officer is particularly revealing in terms of the ways
the professional discourse is revealed through, for example, the demand for business
management and accounting units in public relations courses. That is, the PRIA draws on
outdated conceptualisations of public relations drawn from the dominant paradigm that position public relations as a business management function. This understanding has been prominent in Australia for several decades and can be closely linked to the PRIA’s professional aims.

I acknowledge not all Australian universities that teach public relations seek PRIA accreditation. Although public relations is no longer confined to second-tier universities, PRIA accreditation appears to be of little interest to the few elite Australian universities, known as the Group of Eight, that do teach public relations. Neither UNSW, which teaches a Bachelor of Media and Master’s degree Public Relations and Advertising (see www.arts.unsw.edu.au/) nor the University of Queensland, which offers a Bachelor of Communication (Public Relations) (see www.uq.edu.au/) have sought PRIA accreditation. The University of Western Australia (UWA) (2014) offers a Bachelor of Arts (Communication and Media Studies) that aims to prepare students for “success in a rapidly changing international and media communications environment” and includes no public relations units; however, their promotional material includes information for students who wish to be an “Advertising and public relations manager” (UWA, n.d-a) and “Public relations professional” (UWA, n.d.-b).² For the elite universities, then, a PRIA-accredited qualification is not perceived necessary for a successful career in the field. Indeed, the lack of specific public relations qualifications at UWA suggests that from their perspective, a

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² Recommended courses for students who wish to pursue a career in advertising and public relations include Communication and Media Studies or Marketing, but also identify business law, English and cultural studies, management, and psychology and society as relevant undergraduate studies. Students who wish to pursue a career in public relations management are directed to Bachelor degrees in communication and media studies, marketing, or psychology in society (UWA, n.d.-b). According to the promotional material, postgraduate qualifications are not necessary for public relations careers, but a Master’s degree in business or commerce “may be helpful for career advancement.”
university-level qualification in several disciplines is suitable. Certainly, this issue points to
the PRIA’s failure to regulate the education of future practitioners in Australia in that
lacking a qualification in public relations may not be a barrier to a graduate’s successful
career.

My findings lead me to question whether public relations education should be
formally accredited by the PRIA. I acknowledge the irony given I worked hard to raise the
profile of my university within the industry, served on PRIA state council and national
education committees, and gained PRIA accreditation for the degree introduced in 2006.
But the PRIA has failed to establish jurisdiction over the full range of public relations
activity, and indeed public relations education, in Australia. Public relations operates in a
dynamic and fast-changing communication environment so it is perhaps not surprising that
the skill sets various industry leaders identify as necessary for contemporary practice are by
no means unique to public relations. My questioning of the legitimacy and authority of the
professional association to accredit university courses does not mean that my students will
fail to develop vocationally oriented skills and knowledge that are relevant for their future
practice. I have worked hard to incorporate work-integrated learning opportunities for
students, including a capstone unit where students work in consultancy teams for client
organisations in the not-for-profit sector (see Fitch, 2011), in the curriculum. Rather, I
question the need for universities to seek formal accreditation from a professional
association that struggles to establish its domain over public relations activity, and whose
membership is declining and not representative of the industry. Further, the recent
resignation of the CEO, President, and all but one Board Member suggests the PRIA
continues to be riven with factions (see Christensen, 2014b, 2014c; “Drama and Competing
Accusations,” 2014; Mannix, 2014; and “PRIA Insists,” 2014). In addition, there are other professional associations that represent public relations practitioners in Australia, including MEAA, IAP2, IABC and the Communications Council.

I think there is a bigger picture for university public relations beyond the expectations of the professional association. And, given the spectre of even more significant changes in Australian higher education, with the deregulation of the sector and increase in university fees outlined by the Australian government, then public relations educators in universities need to be clear about what they offer students. The federal government subsidy of communication degrees will be reduced by 49%, and suggests that these courses will become less lucrative for universities. Bachelor degrees in public relations are already offered by private education providers and are now eligible for government subsidies previously reserved for universities. Is there an opportunity for university-level public relations education to build on the commitment to research and to incorporate scholarly perspectives into the public relations curriculum in the increasingly neoliberal university environment? That is, can academic research successfully disrupt existing discourses of professionalism that limit understandings of public relations? Motion and Leitch (2007), drawing on Foucault, point out that a discursive approach not only highlights the limits of the symmetrical model and the focus on organisational goals and business interests, but it potentially opens up the ways public relations is understood, its links with power, and its broader role in society. Discourses can be resisted and displaced. In this thesis, I have shown how the PRIA’s attempt to establish disciplinary boundaries

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3 The Australian government announced widespread changes to the higher education sector in May 2014. The budget is yet to be approved by the Senate but signals the Coalition government’s intention to deregulate the sector, to decrease subsidies to universities, and to allow universities to set fees.
through the regulation of university education occurred in a dynamic environment and was subject to many factors external to the PRIA. These external factors, such as the marketisation and massification of Australian higher education, are ignored in existing histories of public relations in Australia, which are framed within a professional discourse.

I have shown how power is manifest in the production of public relations knowledge. The PRIA was/is not a monolithic entity with a unified voice, but is made up of competing factions. Nevertheless, as I have shown in this thesis, the PRIA sought to establish its jurisdiction over public relations activity in Australia and to regulate the transmission of public relations knowledge through the introduction of a formal accreditation program. It has arguably failed. I have not in this thesis investigated the impact of PRIA accreditation, in terms of the extent that it may have influenced the public relations curriculum. More research is needed to understand what universities teach, and to determine the value, if any, of industry accreditation. Given the disciplinary alliance of public relations primarily with communication in the Australian academy, then it may be that university-level public relations education may never meet the expectations of a professional association that frames the field as a business, management function.

Finally, there are multiple ways that university educators can engage with the communication industry beyond the requirements of PRIA accreditation. I did not in this thesis set out to develop a critical pedagogy for public relations, but the findings reported in this thesis nevertheless have implications for a critical pedagogy. These findings point to the need to question the relevance of an exclusive public relations discipline, given the convergence in industry with marketing and recurring demands by the professional association for a stronger alliance with business. L’Etang and Powell identify the
institutionalisation of public relations as an academic subject as significant in terms of both
the subject becoming “an unquestioned entity” and the conceptualisation of expertise or
knowledge (2013, p. 3). In examining the role of the professional association in the
construction of knowledge, I interrogate existing knowledge structures. I question
assumptions in relation to Australian public relations education and offer new insights into
the role of education in professionalisation, the construction of public relations knowledge,
and the emergence, and, indeed, dominance, of professional discourses for public relations.
I have demonstrated in this thesis the need to understand the significance of particular
social contexts in historical research and of a sociological lens in relation to processes of
professionalisation and the institutionalisation of public relations knowledge.

Researching Public Relations History

Rethinking Australian public relations history. I have presented in this thesis an
historical narrative of the development of public relations education in the late 1980s and
1990s, with reference to earlier courses established in the 1970s. However, I do not suggest
that this narrative represents a linear or an evolutionary progression towards the industry’s
professional standing. Rather, I offer evidence of the contest in the constitution and
institutionalisation of public relations knowledge, illustrated in the industry attempts to
regulate the transmission of that knowledge through the accreditation of university public
relations courses. This contest over public relations knowledge played out in a dynamic
education environment and in an industry sector where the professional association
struggled to maintain a jurisdiction over public relations activity. As such, I offer an
alternative history to mainstream understandings that link the development of public
relations education closely to the existence of the professional association. I challenge the
understanding that university education confirms the professional status of public relations by revealing how particular social structures and political processes, such as the massification and marketisation of Australian higher education, contributed to the development of public relations education and institutionalisation of public relations knowledge.

This thesis highlights a number of issues with current histories of public relations in Australia. It identified a number of factual errors, such as confusion regarding the date of the “first” public relations course and the involvement of Australian higher education institutions in public relations education prior to the Mitchell College course. In part, as Gleeson (2014) identified, the focus on educational developments in New South Wales and Queensland in existing histories ignored developments in other states. My access to PRIA (WA) archives allowed me to incorporate Western Australian perspectives and provided further evidence of tensions between state and national councils. I have also responded to Gleeson’s (2014) call for more research to understand why public relations became aligned with communication studies in Australia. In addition, this thesis challenges more broadly public relations historiography. In Australia, the widely accepted “history” of public relations is presented as the history of the professional institute, established post-World War II and emerging from wartime information campaigns, and the achievement of its members; since then, it has developed into a fully-fledged profession. This historical narrative is reproduced in textbooks, public relations education, and industry narratives and relies primarily on the accounts of senior members of the PRIA and individual practitioners. The history of public relations education is therefore framed within this narrative. However, in Chapter 1, I highlighted a number of problems with this version of
the origins of public relations in Australia: it relies on a narrow conceptualisation of public relations activity, focusing primarily on the work of consultants (Sheehan, 2007) or accepts, uncritically, the reported experiences of practitioners and those “inside” the industry (Crawford & Macnamara, 2012). I also cited L’Etang (2008b) on the dangers of writing uncritical public relations histories, which can serve to justify, defend, and delineate public relations activity.

I reflected on interviews with prominent individuals associated with a professional institute, whose mission is to establish public relations as a management discipline and gain professional status. I drew on previously unstudied archives, which documented the institute’s introduction of a national accreditation program and the PRIA’s interaction with universities. I also examined PRIA national and state archives from the 1980s and 1990s. At face value, I found strong “evidence” of the development of public relations from a publicity function to a profession. However, the profound influence of the dominant paradigm has led to “eyewitness” accounts and archival evidence (such as industry reports and newsletters), which suggests an historical and progressive evolution for public relations from asymmetrical, unethical practice to ethical communication and professional status.

Drawing on the findings reported in this thesis, I challenge these understandings of the development of public relations. This development has been framed primarily in terms of the PRIA’s ambition for professional status. A critical history reveals how this framing ignores the unique social and political contexts in which those developments occurred and corrects inaccuracies in widely accepted historical accounts. I have therefore considered broader societal changes in Australia, and in particular the impact of government policy changes on higher education that allowed the introduction of, and growth in, public
relations courses. Although my research has focused on the archives and perspectives associated with a professional association, by embedding this research in specific social contexts I have sought not to be confined to these perspectives. There is little acknowledgement in the public relations literature of the institutionalisation of communication studies in the academy in Australia; however, I have drawn on this scholarship due to its significance for understanding both the growth of public relations education and the opportunities it offered for the development of public relations scholarship. Further, a critical history illuminates contemporary perspectives on Australian public relations education in that it challenges hegemonic thinking and links knowledge with power. For example, this research highlights internal tensions and hierarchies within the PRIA that played out over public relations education.

The challenge for the researcher, therefore, is to recognise that the interview does not offer an objective and authentic rendering of history. I have reflected on the research process and the subjectivity of participant interviews and acknowledge the subjective role of the researcher in “interpreting” interview data. I conclude that despite the challenges of elite interviews and the limitations of snowball sampling, my analysis of interviews nevertheless offers valuable insights. These insights relate to the retrospective accounts offered by many participants, who frame the development of public relations and the role of education, and indeed their role in that development, within the dominant paradigm, and in tandem, a professional discourse.

In this thesis, I used historical sociology to investigate Australian public relations education in the context of professionalism. In Chapter 1, I identified the need for more documentary evidence and more critical histories of Australian public relations. I have
avoided a narrow and normative understanding of public relations, by investigating how such understandings are manifest in the attempts of a professional association to define, and regulate the transmission of, public relations knowledge. The use of historical techniques – specifically archival research and interviews with prominent individuals associated with a professional association and the development of public relations education – allowed an exploration of the development of education and the dynamic constitution, and indeed contestation, of public relations knowledge. It challenged widely accepted histories of Australian public relations education. Linking shifts in PRIA expectations of, and priorities for, public relations education to broader societal contexts and political processes allows an understanding of public relations beyond the PRIA’s narrow conceptualisation of public relations and its development in Australia. That is, a sociological interpretation of the historical data allows a more critical understanding of the development of public relations education, in that it locates this study within the literature on the sociology of the professions and considers how power is manifest in social structures and institutional processes through the articulation of knowledge.

**Conclusion**

In Chapter 1, I argued that public relations histories tend to be shaped by particular ideologies that support a narrow conceptualisation of public relations, and therefore are understood in terms of a linear progression towards professional status. I identified a need for more critical histories of public relations and a gap in the literature in terms of how professional associations foster professionalism. Therefore, in this thesis, I provided an alternative account of the historical development of public relations education, in part to address existing linear and evolutionary narratives that currently dominate mainstream
understandings of public relations’ development in Australia. Significantly, I consider public relations education in the context of the industry’s preoccupation with professional recognition and in the context of widespread changes in higher education. While these factors are not unique to Australia, I argue that embedding this study in a particular social and historical context allows a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the diverse factors, which influenced the development of public relations as a course of study. Rather than presenting public relations in normative terms as an ethical profession, or in functionalist terms of organisational effectiveness or client perspectives, this study considers public relations from a broader societal perspective. Drawing on a critical analysis of educator and practitioner interviews and professional association archives, I have introduced new perspectives on the development of public relations education in Australia. These perspectives shed light on contemporary discourse around public relations education, and the concerns of the PRIA, as I will demonstrate in the following thesis conclusion.
Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis investigated the role of public relations education in the professionalisation of public relations in Australia. It focused on the years 1985–1999, a period of significant growth for public relations education and a period in which the PRIA sought greater regulation and jurisdiction over public relations activity. These developments continue to inform PRIA accreditation of university courses and industry expectations regarding the role of public relations education. I sought to offer an alternative perspective to widely accepted narratives on the professional development of public relations in Australia, in order to address the narrow conceptualisation of public relations in existing histories. I used historical sociology in that I link the analysis of previously unstudied archives of the professional association, and of interviews with 14 practitioners and educators regarding their perceptions and experiences of the Australian public relations industry and education, to broader societal structures and institutional processes. A history that considers the development of Australian public relations in relation to its specific social context can contribute to a critical pedagogy.

This concluding chapter is structured in three sections. In the first section, I address the research questions identified in Chapter 3, drawing on the findings that emerged from my review of scholarship and my analysis of archives and interviews. In the second section, I outline the implications of the research reported in this thesis for public relations research, theory, and pedagogy, identify directions for further research, and consider the original contributions this study makes. In the final section, I briefly reflect on the implications of this study for my research practice.
Key Findings

In this thesis, I developed five overarching research questions in my investigation of Australian public relations education. I have discussed in depth the themes that emerged from my analysis and are related to these questions. In this section, I offer a succinct summary of the key findings in response to the original research questions.

**Research question 1: What is the relationship between the regulation of public relations education and professionalisation in the Australian context?** The regulation of public relations education was significant for the professional project. It allowed the PRIA to regulate entry into professional-grade membership and to establish the knowledge that underpinned professional practice as part of a broader campaign, introduced in 1985, designed to establish professional recognition for the public relations industry in Australia. The PRIA’s introduction of a national accreditation program for university courses in 1991 aimed to standardise accreditation criteria and industry expectations of education. It can be understood as an attempt to regulate the transmission of public relations knowledge and confirms the PRIA’s attempts to establish its jurisdiction over public relations activity in Australia. However, these attempts were only partly successful as internal tensions within the PRIA, between state and national councils, and resulting from the desire to recognise the expertise of senior members, contributed to diverse understandings of public relations knowledge and expectations of what universities should teach. That is, the professional drive of the industry potentially limited the development of public relations pedagogy in that the PRIA sought functionalist and managerialist understandings of public relations in education.
Research question 2: What is the significance of gender for public relations education? The PRIA had an ambivalent attitude towards education in relation to gender. On the one hand, university education was perceived to address concerns about the lack of professional recognition for public relations, in part due to the rapid feminisation of the field in the 1980s and 1990s. On the other hand, university education was perceived to accelerate this feminisation. The anxiety about professional status contributed to a gendered stratification between different kinds of public relations activity as professional and strategic versus non-professional and technical. The introduction of professional structures, such as practitioner examinations and accredited degrees, aimed to ensure professional-grade membership and high-level public relations activity was demarcated from low-level activity and activity in non-corporate sectors in order to ensure professional recognition. This demarcation was highly gendered. The feminisation of public relations, in line with other feminising occupations, therefore contributed to the establishment of these professional structures and to the constitution of public relations knowledge. That is, the introduction of professional structures and the attempts to establish public relations as a profession defined what was, and was not, public relations activity and in doing so, promoted particular conceptualisations of public relations knowledge and marginalised others. This gendered stratification of public relations knowledge had significant implications for the PRIA’s expectations of university education in that it encouraged public relations to be conceptualised as a management function and strategic business discipline.

Research question 3: How did the PRIA understand public relations knowledge? The findings reported in this thesis confirm the constitution of public relations
knowledge, and its institutionalisation in the Australian academy, was dynamic and contested. Expectations of education were understood in terms of their significance for the professionalisation of the industry and determined by practitioners’ experiences of public relations activity and their expectations as employers of future graduates. However, many of these understandings were also shaped by the dominant paradigm that emerged out of largely US studies. In the first accreditation cycle (1992–1996), the PRIA, through the NEC, defined a suitable curriculum in part by what public relations was not; in their rejection of subjects such as journalism and media studies, the NEC sought to distance public relations from media relations and publicity. At the same time, the NEC demanded the public relations curriculum include communication theory. The shift to greater practitioner involvement in accreditation processes in 1996 led the PRIA to seek a stronger alliance with business, management, and even marketing in the academy despite its association primarily with communication studies in the university sector. The PRIA’s conceptualisation of public relations as a business and management practice was promoted by state council practitioners and the College of Fellows.

Despite the widely acknowledged influence of US public relations scholarship and education resources on the development of public relations in Australia, the findings reported in this thesis demonstrate that Australian public relations was perceived by the PRIA as unique. In part, this conclusion may stem from the focus of this research on a national professional association whose mission is to create a professional occupational identity. As knowledge was conceptualised as emerging from Australian industry practice, the experts were therefore senior PRIA members. That is, a particular kind of Australian cultural capital was perceived necessary for public relations practice. The PRIA sought
greater practitioner involvement in university education in the 1990s and there was a strong
demand for Australian textbooks, case studies, and education resources. Despite significant
transnational public relations activity between Australia and various countries in Asia in
the 1980s and 1990s, and growing international markets for Australian public relations
education following changes in government education policy in 1987 and 1996, the PRIA’s
focus remained primarily on developing a national public relations curriculum and ignored
the impact of globalisation on, and the significant growth in, transnational activity in both
public relations and education.

Research question 4: What was the impact of changes in the Australian higher
education sector on public relations education? A key finding is the significance of the
massification and the marketisation of Australian higher education for the development of
public relations education. Public relations is only one of many vocational courses in the
social sciences, humanities, and business faculties that were introduced to tertiary
education as a result of changes in government policy and funding that led to significant
restructures in the higher education sector. Eyewitness accounts and other historical
narratives that suggest the introduction of public relations courses to universities offers
evidence of the growing professional status of public relations ignore the broader social
context. The significant growth in communication studies in Australia in the late 1980s and
1990s confirms that the growth in public relations courses was not unique. Similarly, the
introduction of more diverse undergraduate and postgraduate courses throughout the 1990s
and the expansion into Southeast Asian markets confirm the institutionalisation of public
relations in the academy primarily offered universities, and in particular lower-status
universities, the opportunity to develop new markets.
Research question 5: What challenges did public relations face in gaining academic legitimacy in Australia? The growing institutionalisation of public relations in the 1990s in the academy faced a number of challenges. Public relations was primarily aligned with communication studies in the Australian university sector, but there was limited engagement with other communication fields. The location of public relations in mostly second-tier institutions and the lack of formal academic qualifications of public relations educators impacted on both the careers of individual academics and on the status of public relations within the academy. The combination of its vocational orientation, industry links, and relative lack of academic scholarship meant public relations struggled to gain disciplinary status. Ironically, as more critical public relations scholarship in communication journals began to emerge in the second half of the 1990s, the PRIA sought a stronger alignment with business and management disciplines and a greater vocational focus in public relations courses. The emergent disciplinary boundaries of public relations were challenged through tensions within the PRIA, which exacerbated and arguably fuelled divisions between industry and the academy in PRIA members’ growing preoccupation with establishing public relations as a business, management discipline.

Significance of the Findings

Implications for public relations research. In Chapter 1, I noted that existing histories of the development of public relations in Australia linked that development primarily to the existence of the PRIA and the achievements of PRIA members. The history of Australian public relations is thus located within a professional narrative. Through analysis of PRIA archives and interviews with practitioners and educators, I have revealed the ways in which the professional narrative informed understandings of public
relations education within the professional project. The findings confirm that these understandings were underpinned by a narrow conceptualisation of public relations knowledge, drawn from Australian industry practice but strongly influenced by the dominant paradigm, and reveal the ways the PRIA sought to regulate the institutionalisation of public relations knowledge in the academy. Although the research reported in this thesis is exploratory, it begins to develop a more critical understanding of the development of public relations, and the role of public relations education in that development, in Australia.

Rather than an evolutionary narrative of the development of Australian public relations, I offer in this thesis an alternative account. Significantly, I consider public relations in the context of the industry’s preoccupation with professional status and in the context of widespread changes in higher education in order to understand the impact on its development. Drawing on Foucault, I investigated the links between the production of a discourse and its broader social context and searched for shifts and disruptions in the discourse rather than linearity and progressivism. While the professional association’s preoccupation with professional status and higher education reforms are not unique to Australia, I argue that embedding this study in a particular social and historical context allows a reconceptualised understanding of the development of public relations and of public relations education in Australia. Rather than presenting public relations in normative and functionalist terms, this study considered public relations from a broader societal and critical perspective. It recognises that the emergence of public relations as a course of study in the 1970s was in response to widespread changes in the Australian higher education sector rather than evidence of the growing professionalism of public relations. To date, the
largely uncritical acceptance and reproduction of practitioner perspectives has framed public relations in terms of its professional development. Although this study drew on PRIA archives and on interviews with primarily PRIA members and former members, the use of historical sociology allowed a more critical understanding of the development of public relations in that it links the PRIA narratives with broader societal changes and interrogates those narratives. This critical perspective is important in that it corrected inaccuracies in existing histories and identified societal factors – external to the PRIA and the public relations industry – that contributed in significant ways to the development of Australian public relations education. The focus on institutional processes and societal context illuminated PRIA’s perspective on university education as integral to the professional project.

The widespread and uncritical acceptance and reproduction of practitioner interviews and memoirs contributed to a number of inaccuracies in existing histories that are reproduced in textbooks, academic research, and by the PRIA. The findings reported in this thesis highlight the need both for more archival research into public relations and for more critical and indeed reflexive approaches to researching public relations history. More archival research is needed to understand the development of Australian public relations and to provide documentary evidence of this development, beyond the achievements of the PRIA. That is, a broader understanding of public relations activity, beyond the confines of the professional association, is needed. Interviews offer additional insights into public relations history, but require a critical approach to avoid repeating the same errors as histories that fail to recognise the significance of the construction of personal narratives and memoirs. The findings reported in this thesis point to the need for a critical approach in
writing public relations histories, particularly in relation to “eyewitness” accounts and archival collections, and for scholars to interrogate the constitution of public relations history.

**Implications for public relations theory.** This thesis has addressed a significant gap in the literature by exploring the processes of professionalisation. Until now, the history of Australian public relations is presented in terms of its development as a profession, that is, in terms of an evolutionary progression towards professional status. As such, public relations tends to be conceptualised in normative and functionalist terms as an ethical and socially responsible practice and as a management discipline underpinned by a body of knowledge. The dominant paradigm continues to influence discourses around public relations education, despite a growth in critical public relations scholarship. In this thesis, I have shown how the dominant paradigm, which emerged out of industry-funded studies in the US, influenced Australian understandings of public relations as a profession.

It is widely recognised in the sociological and public relations literature that knowledge is significant in the constitution of a profession (Pieczka, 2002; van Ruler, 2005). This thesis therefore has considered diverse perspectives on public relations knowledge: its constitution, its institutionalisation, and attempts by a professional association to regulate its transmission. The contested boundaries over the domain of public relations and the gendered stratification of different kinds of public relations activity reveal the PRIA’s struggle to establish public relations as a profession. The PRIA’s conceptualisation of public relations knowledge drew on the dominant paradigm and on Australian industry experience and resulted in an increasingly narrow understanding of public relations and the role of education in the 1990s. The significance is these
understandings, developed in response to specific social and political structures in earlier
decades, continue to resonate in contemporary discourses of public relations education.

This thesis has shown that the conceptualisation of public relations “knowledge” is
dynamic; in the first national accreditation round (1992–1996), a broad generalist education
in any faculty was valued by the NEC, whereas in the second accreditation round (1997–
2001), the greater involvement of practitioners and state education committees in the
accreditation process led to demands for a stronger business and marketing orientation. As
such, the emergent disciplinary boundaries of public relations were contested and
challenged through the internal structures of the PRIA, which exacerbated and arguably
fuelled divisions between industry and the academy. They are, in fact, evidence of
significant jurisdictional struggles. The emergence primarily in communication journals of
critical public relations scholarship that explored broader societal perspectives coincided
with the PRIA’s increasing concerns to align public relations education in business and
management fields, and to promote functionalist understandings, focused on meeting client
or employer objectives.

From the perspective of the professional association, public relations education
played a key role in the industry’s drive towards professionalisation. It offered the means to
regulate PRIA membership, by offering accelerated pathways to professional-grade
memberships to graduates of accredited degrees. It could counter the feminisation of the
field, which was perceived to threaten public relations’ claims to be a profession and a
management discipline. It could help define the “boundaries” of public relations activity,
and distance it from media relations and promotional activity. The greater involvement of
practitioners in state-based education committees in the later accreditation round (1997–
2001) resulted in demands for public relations to be treated as a business discipline and a management field in the university sector. The public relations curriculum could define the body of knowledge, considered necessary for professional recognition. However, this “knowledge” proved problematic for the professional association, in that its senior practitioners, particularly the Fellows, were the designated repository of Australian public relations expertise. The findings, which emerge in this thesis, confirm findings in UK and European studies that for practitioners, public relations knowledge is experiential and constituted in practice (Pieczka, 2002; 2007) and focused on serving client and organisational interests (van Ruler, 2005). This contest around public relations knowledge played out in understandings of the role of public relations education.

The findings reported in this thesis suggest the PRIA sought a significant role in the regulation of Australian public relations education. However, the PRIA’s expectations around universities’ industry engagement and vocational focus in courses contributed to the relatively low standing of the public relations discipline. In addition, the focus on meeting expectations of the Australian industry did not encourage critical engagement with the underlying disciplinary foundations or the introduction of global perspectives on public relations, other than when it was perceived to serve the needs of the Australian industry. Despite the PRIA’s successful claim to be the peak body in regulating public relations education, the broader failure of the PRIA to regulate or maintain a clear jurisdiction over public relations activity in Australia, and the competition between public relations and other fields, such as marketing, advertising, and organisational communication for intellectual and economic space (Abbott, 1988; Suddaby & Viale, 2011), point to an ongoing and significant struggle for public relations in terms of establishing itself as a
unique practice and gaining the professional recognition it craved. The implications for public relations education are profound.

**Implications for public relations pedagogy.** In the introduction to this thesis, I acknowledged my interest in a critical pedagogy for public relations, where students are encouraged to question existing paradigms. Although the development of this pedagogy was not the thesis aim, the findings in this thesis have implications for such pedagogy. I have, for example, questioned the PRIA’s official history of public relations in Australia. I have drawn on the literature to suggest public relations encompasses a much broader understanding than that suggested by the professional association. I have established that public relations remains dominated by functionalism, but I use this critique as a starting point for a revisionist account about public relations education and professional practice in Australia. I argue it is time for public relations scholars to liberate public relations education from a focus on meeting industry needs and to redefine the scope and aims of tertiary public relations education beyond the narrow confines of industry, and, in particular, professional association, perspectives. That is, the findings in this thesis allow an alternative conceptualisation of public relations that can begin to challenge existing disciplinary frameworks.

I fear that the PRIA’s accreditation constrains the public relations curriculum in ways that reflect the concerns and priorities of previous decades. That is, despite scholarly critiques of the dominant paradigm dating back to the 1990s, industry expectations of public relations education continue to be founded on outdated ideas even as the public relations industry recognise the skills and knowledge they require of future employees are changing. Many practitioners working in communication roles are not PRIA members yet
are innovative and socially responsible practitioners. There are alternative professional associations in Australia: IAP2 for community relations and stakeholder engagement (see http://www.iap2.org.au/); the Communications Council for consumer public relations and marketing communication (see www.commscon.com.au); and the IABC is active in some states (see http://vic.iabc.com/). Yet, historically, the PRIA has had the most influence over public relations education and continues to do so even as its membership declines. The point is, as an educator, I seek to engage widely with industry representatives, in order to inform my teaching and my research, and to offer students opportunities through work placements, seminars, and so on. But whether the PRIA is the most suitable organisation to accredit public relations courses, or even if any industry association should seek to manage university course accreditation, deserves further consideration.

This thesis has focused on the development of public relations in a national context. It is beyond the scope of this thesis, but more research is needed into the impact of societal as well as global factors on the development of a national public relations’ curriculum. The history of public relations’ development in terms of transnational activity between Australia and various Asian countries, for instance, is unwritten. Such a history will inform a critical public relations pedagogy that aims to develop socially responsible practitioners and global citizens. The transnational and, indeed, global nature of contemporary public relations education demands a critical understanding of the factors that shaped contemporary public relations discourse and the inequalities embedded both in that discourse and, in turn, existing education structures.
Reflections on my Research Practice

I identified in Chapter 3 a number of limitations to this study. Archival scholars acknowledge that archival research is never complete, and that information gained in other archives may contribute to new understandings of the social structures and institutional processes that shaped public relations knowledge in Australia. This study has therefore been shaped considerably by access, and indeed, challenges in access, to various PRIA archives. With more time, I would seek PRIA state council archives in other states. However, I recognise that this research would have no finite ending, as I found access to archives is often serendipitous, particularly when they are stored in private homes. I therefore offer only a partial account of the role of education in professionalisation in Australia in this thesis, an account that I expect will be modified as new sources and new information become available.

The decision to offer the option of anonymity to participants may have weakened the data from a historical perspective; however, participants who chose anonymity offered frank information regarding internal processes, disputes, and values that could not be found in archives or that contradicted widely accepted accounts of the development of public relations in Australia. There may be advantages in ensuring all participants in interview research are anonymous, but I was mindful that some participants sought to have their achievements in developing public relations education or Australian public relations recognised through this research. I identified interview participants as participants rather than key informants, in part to acknowledge that this research is based on their reconstructed narratives that emerged through interaction with the researcher. I have acknowledged in this study that participants’ experiences are always retrospective and
influenced by the narratives of others.

Finally, I have attempted in this thesis to foreground my subjectivity as a researcher. As a public relations educator, scholar, and PRIA member I am intricately bound up in the dynamic constitution and institutionalisation of public relations knowledge. These roles facilitated access to participants and PRIA archives (although as I have discussed, archival access was not always straightforward). A major challenge, therefore, and as L’Etang (2004) noted, is not to absorb the values of the PRIA’s professional project. The use of historical sociology allowed me to adopt a critical position, in that I was interested in exploring the social structures and institutional processes that led to particular conceptualisations of public relations. In addition, the use of two methods, archival research and interviews, offered additional perspectives on PRIA accreditation processes and the role of education and addressed some of the limitations of each method. For example, the interviews offered diverse perceptions of public relations and the role of university education and the archives revealed the internal PRIA processes and conflicts between state and national councils in the attempt to formally endorse university public relations education as part of a broader strategy of establishing occupational closure.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that from the perspective of the PRIA, tertiary education played a significant role in the professionalisation of public relations in Australia. It has addressed significant gaps in the public relations literature, by providing a critical account of the development of public relations education in Australia, and the role sought by the professional association in that development, in the final decades of the twentieth century. It focused on public relations education in the context of the industry’s
professionalisation and widespread structural changes in higher education. It identified changing industry conceptualisations of public relations knowledge, as public relations became increasingly institutionalised in the academy. As such, it presents an original account of public relations education in Australia, drawing on previously unstudied archives and interviews with participants involved in the PRIA and/or public relations education in Australia. The findings reported in this thesis reveal the constitution and contestation of public relations knowledge, and the emergence of jurisdictional struggles and fledgling disciplinary boundaries. For the PRIA, public relations education could potentially contribute to professional recognition and establish public relations as a business and management discipline. For the university sector, public relations courses offered important revenue. The findings reported in this thesis offer evidence of the role education plays in processes of professionalisation, and contribute an Australian perspective to global scholarship on public relations history and professionalisation. A revised history of the development of Australian public relations also contributes to a broader understanding of public relations and its role in society and allows the development of a critical pedagogy for public relations.
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Welcome to eight new members. (1984, September). *Profile: The Newsletter of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (WA)*, p. 3.


Appendix A
Australian Higher Education Institutions Offering Accredited Public Relations Courses in the 1990s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>University of Canberra</td>
<td>University of Canberra</td>
<td>University of Canberra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Charles Sturt</td>
<td>University of Western Sydney</td>
<td>University of Western Sydney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University of Newcastle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University of Western Sydney</td>
<td>UTS – Broadway</td>
<td>UTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UTS – Broadway</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Queensland University of Technology</td>
<td>Bond University</td>
<td>Bond University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Queensland University of Technology</td>
<td>Queensland University of Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>University of Southern Queensland</td>
<td>University of Southern Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>South Australia College of Advanced Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>University of South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Deakin University</td>
<td>Deakin University</td>
<td>Deakin University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victoria University of Technology</td>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>RMIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monash University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Curtin University</td>
<td>Curtin University</td>
<td>Curtin University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Edith Cowan</td>
<td>Edith Cowan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>University</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL** 10 12 13

*Note. Sources include Anderson archives [c. 1990–2001], PRofessional, The [ca. 1996], Quarles (1993), Quarles & Potts (1990), Quarles & Rowlings (1993), and Starck (1999).*
Appendix B
Growth in Australian Accredited Undergraduate and Postgraduate Courses in the 1990s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undergraduate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Arts</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Communication</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Business/Commerce</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postgraduate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate Diploma</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters of Arts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters of Business</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters (Professional Communication)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL undergraduate and postgraduate courses</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* These figures are indicative. As Quarles and Potts note, the statistics offer “a snapshot in time” and “changes in tertiary programmes continue almost daily on a national and local basis” (1990, p. 4). Although Quarles and Potts (1990) state ten courses are accredited, the Anderson archives indicate at least one additional course was accredited by a state council prior to 1990. There is also a small discrepancy between Starck (1999) and the evidence in the Anderson archives in 1997–2001, when universities submitted multiple courses for accreditation, discontinued existing courses, and introduced new courses. Starck cites an accredited Master of Arts for which I can find no record in the Anderson archives (File 2). Sources are Anderson archives [c. 1990–2001], *Professional, The* [ca. 1996], Quarles (1993), Quarles & Potts (1990), and Starck (1999).
Appendix C  
Schedule of Participant Interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and PRIA membership</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Background information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Potts FPRIA</td>
<td>December 4, 2010</td>
<td>Potts developed a tertiary public relations course in 1971 and established greater regulatory procedures for PRIA membership as national examiner (1985–2001) and NEC foundation member. He received a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2012 to recognise his contributions to public relations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Smith FPRIA</td>
<td>January 18, 2011</td>
<td>Smith, a former journalist, worked as a practitioner from 1962. He joined ECU in the mid-1990s, where he taught until 2012. He was a PRIA (WA) state councillor with education and training portfolios in three different periods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4 FPRIA</td>
<td>March 25, 2011</td>
<td>This participant taught public relations from the late 1980s through to the 2000s. They participated in education and other PRIA committees at state and national levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6 FPRIA</td>
<td>August 12, 2011</td>
<td>This participant worked in the corporate sector in the 1980s and 1990s. They were a PRIA state president and a member of the PRIA national council in the 1990s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy Tymson FPRIA</td>
<td>August 18, 2011</td>
<td>Tymson established a public relations consultancy (1983–1992) and was PRIA (NSW) state president and national president in the 1980s. She taught in a technical institute and co-wrote <em>The Australian public relations manual</em> (Tymson &amp; Sherman, 1987).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

* Fellow (FPRIA) is a prestigious, invitation-only PRIA membership category. It is offered to members who are considered by the national board to have made an outstanding contribution to the profession. MPRIA designates professional-grade membership.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wendy Yorke</td>
<td>September 8, 2011</td>
<td>Yorke worked in public relations for a museum in 1983, and then Eric White Associates and in the corporate sector before returning to consultancy work in the late 1980s. She joined PRIA in 1984.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>October 13, 2011</td>
<td>This participant worked in public relations consultancies for over three decades. They served on state and national PRIA councils and committees, including tertiary education committees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>October 17, 2011</td>
<td>This participant established a public relations consultancy in the early 1990s. They held PRIA offices at state and national level, including committees relating to education and training, during the 1990s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Mackey</td>
<td>September 3, 2012</td>
<td>S. Mackey has taught at Deakin University (formerly Warrnambool Institute of Technology) since 1990. He worked as a press officer for the Inner London Education Authority, after a career in journalism. He completed a PhD in 2001.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Quarles</td>
<td>September 25, 2012</td>
<td>Quarles taught at RMIT (1989–1994). She was a NEC member, PRIA state councillor, and a member of the International Public Relations Association’s Educators Advisory Council in the early 1990s. Quarles co-wrote Practising public relations: A case study approach (Quarles &amp; Rowlings, 1993).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Putnis</td>
<td>September 27, 2012</td>
<td>Putnis developed communication studies at Bond University (1989–1996) before joining the University of Canberra in 1996 as faculty dean of communication. He is a past president of the Australian Communication Association (1992–1993).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D
Feedback to Interview Participants (Phases 1 & 3).

Feedback on history of public relations education project
I interviewed fourteen educators and practitioners regarding their perceptions, recollections and experiences of public relations education, focusing on the 1980s and 1990s in Australia. I identified the following themes in my analysis of the interviews.

Education and professionalisation
The expansion of the Australian higher education in the 1970s and 1980s allowed opportunities for newer, vocational courses such as public relations to be introduced as a university-level course of study.

University education was perceived to improve the professional standing of public relations and confirm its status as a management discipline, and became a prerequisite for entry into public relations. Practitioners without an approved university degree had to undergo either an examination or a senior professional assessment.

University public relations education was perceived to contribute to the feminisation of public relations in the 1980s.

The PRIA introduced a national, standardised accreditation program in 1991; until then, individual PRIA state councils endorsed university courses, and this endorsement was ratified by national council.

Public relations education
Interview participants reported mixed perceptions of the value of public relations education; for example, some expressed concern that university courses were too theoretical in terms of preparing students for public relations careers, while others perceived education as critical to establishing public relations as a profession, particularly through the teaching of strategy and research skills.

Many practitioners taught in universities, or contributed in other ways, for example, through participating in course advisory or accreditation review committees; writing textbooks or textbook chapters; and offering mentoring and internship opportunities to students.

Participants reported heavy teaching loads and responsibility for development of the public relations curriculum and teaching resources (often drawn from their professional experience and industry networks).

US textbooks dominated the public relations textbook market, and all educators noted the lack of Australian public relations textbooks. The Golden Target awards catalogue, compiled in the early 1990s, offered Australian, best-practice case studies.
Participants noted undergraduate public relations courses were attractive to international students from the late 1980s, and in the 1990s Australian universities increasingly taught public relations overseas (mostly in Asia). Some participants taught in Asia, or visited education institutions and professional associations in various Asian countries to establish partnerships and articulation agreements.

**Public relations in the academy**
Few educator participants had a traditional academic career path, as they were primarily employed on the basis of their professional industry experience. However, in the 1990s, educators were increasingly encouraged to enrol in PhDs.

The introduction of public relations to mostly “second-tier” colleges of advanced education and institutes of technology meant teaching and industry engagement were prioritised over scholarly research.

Public relations struggled to be recognised as a discipline in the academy; it faced resistance from journalism and cultural studies academics and encroachment from marketing. Most participants reported public relations programs were located in communication studies rather than business faculties. However, several participants expressed a preference for a stronger business orientation in public relations education.
Appendix E
Feedback to Interview Participants (Phase 2).

We interviewed six participants about their recollections and experiences of working in public relations, with a focus on the 1980s. However, we acknowledge this often involved some discussion of the 1970s and 1990s. The small sample allowed us to conduct in-depth interviews. We approached this data through two broad themes:

1. The feminisation of public relations; and

2. The role of public relations education.

The feminisation of public relations (Kate Fitch & Amanda Third)

Gendered work environments

Three participants started working in public relations roles in the 1970s, noting pathways through secretarial and promotional roles. Most participants entered the field following a university education (although none had public relations undergraduate degrees). Journalism was perceived to be the most common entry into public relations, although two participants attributed their initial appointments, despite a lack of formal training in public relations or journalism experience, to their interpersonal skills.

Public relations roles and sectors appeared to be stratified by gender. For example, several participants noted the corporate sector was “very blokey,” reporting they were often the only female staff member in a management position. Others noted more opportunities for women to move into management in the public sector, but even here a distinction was made between public affairs and promotional activity. The consultancy sector offered many opportunities for women, but some participants suggested women were more likely to work with certain kinds of clients, for example, fast-moving consumer goods. In the mid- to late 1980s, there were lots of opportunities in consultancies, or participants established their own agencies.

Professional identities

Participants reported mixed experiences, with some facing blatant sexism and others reporting little direct discrimination.

Participants acknowledged the kinds of work they performed often differed from the work of male colleagues.

All participants joined the PRIA, and found this a useful professional network (and on many occasions, an alternative to the “old boys” network). All but one participant served on state or national committees.
Consultancy work was perceived to offer more freedom and more opportunities for women than in-house roles.

**Industry responses to feminisation of PR**
The feminisation of public relations was perceived to be an industry problem, in that being perceived as “women’s work” undermined the field’s professional standing.

Participants perceived more rigorous methodologies, founded on university education and research, would improve the field’s professional status.

At the same time, university courses were perceived to contribute to the feminisation of public relations; the PRIA introduced more rigorous membership criteria and standardised the accreditation of university courses to ensure greater professionalism and raise industry standards.

**The role of public relations education (Kate Fitch)**
The role education played in the feminisation and professionalisation of public relations in Australia emerged from the initial study as a significant theme. Kate interviewed an additional eight educators and practitioners to explore this theme in more depth. Some of the initial findings include:

**Education and professionalisation**
The expansion of the Australian higher education in the 1970s and 1980s allowed opportunities for newer, vocational courses such as public relations to be introduced as a university-level course of study.

University education was perceived to improve the professional standing of public relations and confirm its status as a management discipline, and became a prerequisite for entry into public relations. Practitioners without an approved university degree had to sit either an examination or undergo a senior professional assessment.

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