

Alumni Newsletter **PRSSA**

Public Relations
Student Society
of America

“Forever Redbirds Issue”

Fall 2016



CONTENTS

Grateful for ISU’s Opportunities,
p. 1

Alumni in the Spotlight: Cassidy
Obis, p. 3

Tips and Tricks from Media Man
Bruce Kennedy, p. 6

The Many Paths of PR, p. 8

Grateful for ISU’s Opportunities By: Cassie McNeill

Illinois State University is among the top public universities in the nation and within ISU has its many nationally recognized student run organizations. Such as The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) which is the foremost organization for students interested in public relations as a profession. Part of our mission is to “serve its members by enhancing their knowledge of public relations and providing access to professional development opportunities.” Many of the students who graduate and leave ISU as a PRSSA alumni go on into the field of their choosing with more experience than the average public relations graduate. Among those PRSSA alumni is Kelly Larson. Larson graduated in May of 2016 and went on to work as an intern with Franchise Elevator PR. She explained that networking played a big role in getting her current position.

“I can thank networking and a past ISU PRSSA connection for the internship. After passing on my résumé to that connection who works for Franchise Elevator’s sister agency, Fishman

PR, I went through about a two-month long interview process,” said Larson.

Larson’s current position is primarily media relations. As part of her work duties she is constantly pitching over the phone and via email every day to producers and reporters. The end goal is to gain media opportunities for the clients. Larson explained that she is still learning something new each day.

“When drafting a pitch you must be clear and concise in order to compel whomever you are pitching to want to work with you. Gaining success in media relations does not come easy. I have learned and am still learning those skills through practice,” said Larson.

She expressed great gratitude for her current writing skills and Associated Press style knowledge to the ISU courses and capstones. Such as Convergent Media Writing and Public Relations Writing and Production.

In the time Larson spent as a member of PRSSA she explained that her favorite experience was attending national conference her senior year in Atlanta. Where she met many different students and professionals from across the country.

“That experience exposed me to several networking opportunities. It was also a fun bonding experience with other members to explore a city that none of us had ever been to before,” said Larson.

Like most college students Larson was not completely certain on what she wanted to study but ultimately went with PR.

“I originally wanted to pursue a degree in marketing, but after doing some research I felt like PR gave me more of an opportunity to be creative. I have always enjoyed writing and thinking outside of the box, which is something PR thrives upon.” Once graduating Larson said that she quickly found out that she still had a lot to learn.

“Once you graduate you have this sense that you know everything and can do no wrong. I quickly realized that was not the case. I am not the best writer or communicator and I still learn how to become better one every day,” said Larson.

Her advice for current ISU students and PRSSA members is to take advantage of all internship opportunities and the resources available at ISU. Also saying that her undergrad internship “opened her eyes” to what it’s like to work and represent a company.

Alumni in the Spotlight: Cassidy Obis

By: Megan Pellock

With only being in my first year of college, it is hard to think far ahead into the future of what I want to do with a career in public relations. I got the chance to get a glimpse into what life is like after graduation. Cassidy Obis is a 2015 graduate with a degree in public relations from Illinois State University. She is also a former member and president of Public Relations Student Society of America on campus. Cassidy now works at Fishman Public Relations as an account executive in Northbrook, IL.

What is your current position and how did you end up there?

I’m currently an account executive at Fishman Public Relations. Upon graduating from ISU, I interned with a public relations firm in downtown Chicago. Following that internship, I started full time at Fishman PR as an account coordinator. In June 2016, I was selected as the agency’s intern coordinator, which is a one-year commitment. I was recently promoted to account executive last month.

What are some of the skills needed



for your position? Where and how did you learn those skills?

The number one skill needed for my position as account executive is time management. Working at a PR agency really tests you on that skill. There’s always something you could be pitching, so it’s finding time and balance to accomplish everything you need to do. I think having multiple internships and working through college helped me develop these skills. You constantly need to assess and reprioritize what’s on your plate each day.

What made you become interested in PR? When did you discover this?

I became interested in PR during high school, although I didn't recognize what it was at the time. I worked on a charity project that involved a lot of event planning and media relations. I really loved working on that project and did well with it. When it came time to start looking at different schools, majors and programs, I drew back on this experience. My counselor was able to help me identify PR as a career path, which I then pursued.

What different internships did you have? What did you learn from those internships?

I had several internships: Special Olympics Illinois, Normal CornBelters, Advocate BroMenn Medical Center, COUNTRY Financial, School of Communication Promotion and Development team, and I was an undergraduate teaching assistant for the Introduction to PR class. Additionally, I held a post-grad internship. There's so much I learned from each of those internships that it would take me forever to list out. But I think overall, they taught me how to be a better PR professional. I feel that each internship built upon previous ones. For example, I don't think I would've gotten my corporate internship if it weren't for the three I had before it. I also don't think I would've gotten my post-grad internship were it not for that corporate one. Finally, I was hired full time at Fishman, rather than having to start out as an intern, because I had a previous PR agency internship. I think it's important as a student to have some sort of end goal in mind that you're working toward. You need to have a plan, but you also need to accept that plan will change.

How did PRSSA and ISU prepare you for postgraduate life?

PRSSA provided me with so many pre-professional opportunities, such as agency tours, networking opportunities and overall PR education. I don't think anyone can be fully prepared for postgraduate life until you're actually living it, but I truly do believe both PRSSA and ISU prepared me tremendously. There are opportunities offered to students on campus and from the local community that I don't think people get at other schools. Having had conversations with colleagues about things we did while in school, it's clear ISU and the PRSSA Chapter there are top notch.

As a former president of PRSSA, how has that position been beneficial to you in finding a job?

I think that as a former president of PRSSA, it helped me stick out when applying for jobs. It shows that I went beyond just being a member and truly got involved. It also shows that I have leadership and management experience, which I think employers look for. They want people who take initiative. However, I don't think president is the only title to aim for – a position within one of the committees is just as great. Being a leader at any level within the Chapter is going to make you stick out.

What is some advice you would give to students studying PR?

I would highly recommend to anyone interested in working at a PR agency to try to obtain an agency internship while you're still in school. It's honestly the best way to test if that career path is for you – because it's not for everyone. Interestingly enough, while I was in school, I really did not want to end up working at a PR agency. I think it's important to leave your options open and try new opportunities, because you'll never know what you like until you give it a try (or vice versa)! I would also recommend students studying PR to join PRSSA, but most importantly get involved. Don't pay for the membership and not take advantage of everything available to you. Attend agency tours, go to networking dinners, and take on leadership positions. Those are the things that are going to set you apart. Internships are important too, but even more so what you do at them. Having one or two internships isn't going to set you apart anymore – everyone's doing them. It's important to take advantage of your time during school to seek multiple opportunities. Don't stick to one kind of internship – there are truly so many great local organizations that ISU PR students really can get a spread.

What is the most rewarding part of your job? What makes it all worthwhile?

The most rewarding part of my job is sharing a placement with a client and hearing from them how it impacted them. Fishman PR specializes in franchise systems, so some clients hire us on to do franchise development PR to get them franchise leads. There's nothing better than hearing the story you landed in a local business journal led to the client closing a deal in that market. We also do consumer PR for our clients. I recently worked on a project for the first Illinois opening of a restaurant. To hear that the work we did led to customers coming in the door makes it so worthwhile.

Tips and Tricks from Media Man Bruce Kennedy

By: Manny Carerra



Bruce Kennedy is a 2013 Public Relations alumnus, with if you've ever seen his LinkedIn, has plenty of experience during his time at Illinois State University. He was greatly involved at ISU and the Public Relations Student Society of America chapter, holding positions from Director of Relations and Secretary on the executive board. Kennedy was also a Student Blogger at Office of Admissions. Today, he is the Social Media Manager at Cision, a global public relations and communications software company. I had a chance to ask him a few questions about his current job, PRSSA, ISU and a few things that got him to where he is today.

Bruce claims he used Cision every day as a senior account executive at Motion PR. His leadership experience lead him to a career at Cision.

Bruce also had this about Cision, "I have a passion for technology and public relations, Cision sits at the intersection of those two worlds so the opportunity to join the team was too good to pass up."

"Social media and PR are constantly evolving; the day-to-day tactics you use will be a lifelong learning experience."

When asked about where you learned the skills he uses today, he recalls, it was a mix from lessons he learned at ISU and 'on the job' experiences. Saying that strategic thinking, creative writing, engaging storytelling and other lessons you learn in the classroom will still be relevant no matter how much the industry changes. Be sure to learn those lessons now.

What's the most rewarding thing about your job?

Being able to drive conversations with industry leaders in every aspect from PR, marketing, SEO and social media. Picking out a great quote or statistic from a webinar we host or article we share and seeing that spark a conversation has to be the most rewarding part.

When it comes to social media, what's the most effective way to plan social media posts without becoming repetitive?

Authenticity is key. You may need to share a post because it is your company's blog, but take it a step further: what do you find interesting? More importantly, why might your followers find it interesting? It is important to truly engage with the audience you are trying to target, rather than just "talk at" them. Are you taking into consideration their language, likes, dislikes or what's trending? What would you say about it if you were face-to-face and you really thought they would enjoy it?

It is always more effective to highlight an interesting statistic, great quote or key point of an article. For example, if you want to share a story with PR firms on new data about how marketers budget for PR you could say, "Allocation of PR budgets within the marketing mix" or you could say "80 percent of marketers believe earned media is more effective than paid. So why does advertising still receive more budget than PR?"

In terms of planning, I look at data on what times of the day posts perform best and optimize a schedule. As we produce content, I pull best quotes, statistics and points from each article and create posts from that. I like to look at things through the filter of "what could start an interesting conversation" rather than just "what do we as a brand want to say about this topic."

How did ISU and PRSSA help in post-grad life?

PRSSA's influence on my career couldn't be more apparent. I landed my first job after reaching out to a connection I made on an agency tour. Having a foot in the door and background on the agency was invaluable. In my new role at Cision, my first big event was PRSA International Conference this October where we launched our new Cision Communication Cloud. Having attended PRSSA National Conference twice (once as a member and once while on the executive board) it was more like a homecoming than my first big company event. I should clarify by homecoming I mean I was familiar with the event not that it was anything like ISU Homecoming. #GoRedbirds

What do you miss the most about ISU/PRSSA?

I would say the people but some of the people I met through ISU/PRSSA are my closest friends to this day. I am the type of person who loves to learn. What I learned in my time at ISU from amazing professors like Dr. Hayes, Dr. Smudde, Dr. Zompetti and too many others to name, has been vital in my career and life since ISU.

PRSSA allowed me to learn from industry leaders and I am lucky to still do so in my current role, surrounded by experts in marketing, leadership, SEO and communications. I do miss the academic learning setting. You may not believe it now, but one day you

will miss sitting down in a room with a professor and 20 other students, discussing that week's reading.

Advice for students studying PR?

Get involved in every way possible. Do you have an internship? If not, report directly to Tom Lamonica's office. Are you involved in PRSSA? Good, now push yourself to be more involved. Take on that extra blog post, make time for that networking event and be sure to attend that workshop. There will never be another time in your life where so many people are invested in your personal growth, be sure to take full advantage of it.

The Many Paths of PR



Ian De La Rosa, an Illinois State University and PRSSA alumnus, has effectively put his experiences as a PR student and professional into play. Although he graduated from Illinois State with a degree in public relations, he found his way into the digital marketing field. Shortly after

By: Anna Cachares

graduation he began working in Chicago at Revenew, which merged with his current company, Aprimo, an integrated marketing software company that provides companies with on demand marketing software to help manage various aspects of marketing. Here, he began as a digital marketing coordinator doing basic campaign work and after becoming more involved within the company, he became a senior digital marketing analyst where his responsibilities include managing a digital marketing team, presenting digital marketing strategies and results to brands, and researching and developing an automated advertising program for his company.

To gain some perspective on life after graduation, I took the time to ask De La Rosa a few questions about his experiences and lessons learned in the working world.

Were you always interested in the PR industry?

Initially I came into ISU in the marketing program. I took my first few marketing courses, but they didn't bring me the same level of passion for the field that PR did (at least in my opinion). When I took the Introduction to PR class, I was hooked! I immediately felt that the PR degree gave me the more robust experience I was looking for. The PR program also taught you so much, you weren't just restricted to one specific job title. The degree gave me an education in more than just one area. One day you could be doing a press release for a major brand, the next you could be working an event. I certainly see myself continuing on in my career field. I kind of fell into the digital marketing world, but the PR program has prepared me so well, I just can't see myself doing anything else.

How did your experience in ISU PRSSA's Chapter help prepare you for the post-grad life?

PRSSA and ISU prepared me in many ways. The two that stood out the most were time management and research. Being involved in PRSSA, my PR major classes, and the executive board taught me how to balance my time and prioritize tasks. In the post-grad world, you are going to be given many assignments at once and have to be comfortable figuring out what comes first.

There will also be clients that will ask many questions, and you need to know the answer right away. The PR program helped me understand the research element of it all so that I can quickly find an answer, the source or data to back it up, and present it to the client in a meaningful way.

What are some of the most crucial skill needed for your position?

Primarily, data segmentation. Think of all the efforts that one of your future clients might want to evaluate. You have everything from various sets of ad copy, keywords, call to actions and landing pages to evaluate. Add this to the various efforts from the print side to the social media site, and there is a lot to look at. I had to learn on the fly how to organize all of the numbers

and statistics to tell the story on what is and what isn't working. A lot of the time it just meant sitting down and playing Excel pivot tables and v-lookups until I was able to get comfortable with them. YouTube and related forums helped me figure out the processes needed.

What are the most rewarding parts of your job, and do you face any major challenges?

The most rewarding part about the job is seeing the strategies I've developed pay off for the brand in a big way. Anyone can put a banner ad on a website, but being able to work with a brand to put the ads on a site where a consumer engages with it is a whole other story.

There are a few brands that we work with that are always looking to do something new. The challenging part is that it sometimes requires us to come up with a process or strategy practically on the spot. This means we have to become experts on a subject overnight. Luckily, I work with a team of incredibly intelligent individuals who push each other and we figure it out.

If you could give current PRSSA members and PR students any advice they won't always hear on succeeding in the public relations industry, what would it be?

The world of PR is constantly evolving. Read and take in as much as you can about other industries. Many think PR is just writing press releases and updating Facebook statuses, but being able to speak to all efforts for a client is what can make or break your agency or corporation.

Realizing the importance of getting started on a career path, De La Rosa would love to help current ISU PRSSA students answer any questions about public relations or the digital marketing field. He can be contacted via email at ian.delarosa@aprimo.com.

Meet the Authors



Grateful for ISU's
Opportunities
By: Cassie McNeill



Alumni in the Spotlight:
Cassidy Obis
By: Megan Pellock



Tips and Tricks from Media
Man Bruce Kennedy
By: Manny Carrera



The Many Paths of PR
By: Anna Cachares