DEFINITION OF THE CAREER PATH

The career path is a road map to the various jobs and responsibilities that the professional will encounter in the field of communications. It begins with entry-level jobs and progresses to more senior positions with increased responsibilities. The path is not linear and may include opportunities for advancement within the same company or moving to different organizations. The goal is to provide a clear understanding of the potential career trajectory within the field of communications.
Excluded from this list are customers or consumers, a public attended to by professionals involved in advertising, marketing, opinion research, publicity and promotion, and is categorized separately.

The public relations professional is concerned with how the company is perceived by the various target audiences. The PR practitioner, by research and evaluation, finds out the expectations and concerns of the various groups and reports back to the organization on his or her findings. A good public relations program needs the support of the organization and the public it is involved with.

The Public Relations Society of America offers accreditation to PR professionals who have been in the field, either in practice or teaching in an accredited college or university, for a period of time not less than five years. After candidates pass a written and oral examination to demonstrate their competence and knowledge, they are given the right to use the designation "PRSA Accredited" or "APR." This adds to their professional credibility and personal confidence.

Many of the following job titles fall under the umbrella of public relations.

**Corporate Communicators**

Corporate communicators come with a variety of job titles and perform a mixed bag of functions. As troubleshooters, they handle communication disorders within organizations, acting as problem-solvers, group facilitators, negotiators, and mediators. In this capacity they can also be concerned with keeping professional morale high and keeping workers energized and creative. Whether as an in-house employee or as an independent consultant, a corporate communicator specializing in disorders will conduct a needs analysis and then design and implement a program to tackle the specific problem. For example, corporate communicators at Exxon conduct seminars for managers to heighten awareness of the concerns of minority and female employees. Various methods and techniques are used such as role-playing, values clarification, simulations, and other hands-on exercises.

AT&T instituted an open line for employees to voice their concerns and complaints. Southwestern Bell Telephone arranged for its managers to appear on radio talk shows to respond to complaints and questions from listeners.

Corporate communicators, functioning much as PR specialists would, also act as external troubleshooters, handling problems that develop between an organization and the community within which it is located. Experience has shown that readily sharing information with the community and the media, as well as with employees, can turn around relationships initially based on strife and conflict into working, productive alliances. Atlantic Richfield publishes a weekly tabloid newspaper read by 76,000 employees around the world. Among other newsworthy events, the paper reports on deaths resulting from company accidents, details of unfavorable lawsuits, competition in the field, and analyses of the causes for depressed stock prices.

AT&T Technologies is another example of a company that recognizes the importance of candor. It developed a guide for its spokespersons, advising them to be forthright with the press, and pointing out that the company's interests are served best by volunteering bad news instead of trying to cover it up.

A major accident at a chemical plant in Martinez, California, in 1992 is a good illustration of how this works. Two maintenance workers accidentally opened a valve on a tank storing spent sulfuric acid. One of the workers was killed and the fires resulting from the spill shut down a major freeway. Because the community had already been in a four-year battle with the company, opposing a permit to incinerate hazardous waste, the accident spurred panic and anger. Company spokespersons handled the crisis with sincere apologies and a constant, ongoing availability of information to the press and the community. After two years, the open communication and a change of attitude and management improved relations between the company and the community to such a point that both sides feel there is now an atmosphere of trust and confidence.

In addition to problem-solving roles, corporate communicators can also be hired to work in the area of multimedia communications, both in-house and external. IABC president Norman Leaper notes that, "Progressive organizations have replaced self-serving news releases and publications featuring pompous pep talks on productivity with communication programs that include sophisticated films, video tapes, and other audio-visual efforts, bulletin board presentations, telephone news systems and hotlines—and literally scores of other forms of communication—that reach millions of people within and outside the organization."

Corporate communicators arrange news conferences; conduct surveys; produce radio or TV news shows; arrange monthly "gripe" sessions between management and staff; design brochures describing the company's strengths and aims; write speeches for the CEO to deliver to stockholders; arrange seminars and workshops; edit glossy magazines; or initiate programs to ensure workplace safety or increase environmental awareness.

Corporate communicators interested in editing and publishing have an estimated 28,000 internal and external organizational publications to approach throughout the U.S. and Canada. Only 20 percent of consumer magazines hire new grads right out of college, and when they do, they usually position the new staff in low-responsibility slots. Communications majors entering the world of business get a shot at the whole show, from planning features to choosing illustrations.

What follows is an actual job advertisement for an experienced corporate communicator:
in the world to you within a few days, a change of one or two dollars, a phone call or letter will have information that changes at one of two dollars, a phone call or letter will have information that changes at one of two dollars, a phone call or letter will have information that changes at one of two dollars, a phone call or letter will have information that changes at one of two dollars, a phone call or letter will have information that changes at one of two dollars, a phone call or letter will have information that changes at one of two dollars, a phone call or letter will have information that changes at one of two dollars, a phone call or letter will have information that changes at one of two dollars, a phone call or letter will have information.
CAREER OUTLOOK

Businesses and other organizations spend more than $1 billion dollars annually to communicate with employees or members, with even more money going to fund communication with external audiences such as customers, community residents, alumni, opinion leaders, and the public-at-large.

According to predictions made in the Occupational Outlook Handbook, published by the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of corporate communications managers is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2005. Employment for public relations specialists other than managers is expected to increase about as fast as the average for all jobs through the year 2005.

Employment in public relations firms is expected to grow more than in any other setting, as corporations, trying to keep costs down, hire contractors to provide PR services rather than support a full-time communications staff.

Keen competition for these jobs, however, will likely continue among recent college graduates with degrees in communications and related fields because the number of applicants is expected to exceed the number of job openings.

Strategic for Finding the Jobs

There are estimated 3.6 million active corporations in the United States. While not every one of them provides a setting in which communications majors would prefer to work, enough do.

Scan the Help Wanted Ads

The traditional job hunting method—reviewing help wanted ads—seldom reaps rewards for the new, inexperienced grad. Most job advertisements are for specialists with time and experience under their belts, or for pre-entry-level clerical jobs that might not offer enough exposure to lead to promotion. However, the want ads should not be ignored. The plum job you are perfect for could crop up in next Sunday's paper.

Knock on Doors

Knocking on doors is what experts advise. Find the firm for which you would like to work and become a familiar face in the personnel department or front reception area.

Join Professional Associations

Professional associations often maintain job banks. The journals and newsletters they publish usually feature job advertisements. And the regional or national conferences they hold often have job clearinghouses with recruiters in attendance.

Find a Mentor

Your alumni association can put you in touch with professionals who might be able to give you leads.

Check with Your College Department

Don't forget to inquire at your communications department office. It is not unusual for a corporation to call a university and ask for a list of graduating seniors. The jobs they are seeking to fill might also be announced on department bulletin boards.

Register with Your College Placement Office

College placement offices and career service centers can also provide good leads for your job search. While some employers contact individual departments directly, others send their job openings to the placement office or career counselor.

Help in Locating These Employers

Hit the library! There are directories galore that list professional associations, public relations firms, and corporations by industry. Make friends with your reference librarian and bring plenty of change for the copy machine.

The following contacts, journals, and directories only begin to scratch the surface.

Communication World
International Association of Business Communicators
One Hallidie Plaza, Suite 600
San Francisco, CA 94102

Encyclopedia of Associations
Gale Research, Inc.
P.O. Box 33477
Detroit, MI 48232-5477
If the starting salaries seem disappointingly low, the good news is that as employees travel up the corporate ladder, salaries rise with them. The Public Relations Society of America's eighth annual salary survey (1993) revealed a median salary of $46,204 for management level employees in a variety of business settings.

The following chart will give you an idea of your earning potential after a few years in a variety of settings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEDIAN SALARIES BY AREA OF SPECIALTY</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investor Relations</td>
<td>$66,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>62,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Affairs</td>
<td>54,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Relations</td>
<td>54,595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues Management</td>
<td>54,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Management</td>
<td>52,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Affairs</td>
<td>51,926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>50,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Communications</td>
<td>50,634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Planning</td>
<td>50,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalists</td>
<td>49,108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>47,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Relations</td>
<td>46,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Relations</td>
<td>46,142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Relations</td>
<td>45,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>45,345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Events</td>
<td>45,224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity</td>
<td>44,893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations Education</td>
<td>43,674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>43,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising/Philanthropy</td>
<td>39,676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publications/Brochures</td>
<td>34,678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>43,089</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The salary survey also revealed that across the board salaries are higher in corporations as compared to salaries in public relations firms, government agencies, the health care industry, and nonprofit settings.

In addition to their salaries, a large portion of business communicators can expect to receive annual bonuses equal to ten percent of their salary.
Here is an actual job advertisement for a position utilizing communications skills in a health care setting:

CRITICAL INQUIRY COORDINATOR

Currently has an opportunity available for a critical inquiry coordinator with the critical inquiry department. This department is responsible for research, resolution, and response to formal grievances and appeals filed by clients and providers.

This position requires a conscientious individual with excellent communication and organizational skills. Outstanding skill in letter composition is a must. Candidate must possess a minimum of two years' of college and related work experience or a bachelor's degree in communications, English, journalism, or health care administration. Send resume to . . .

As you start your own job search you will see that the employment possibilities health care settings offer for communications majors are broad and stimulating.

**Related Occupations**

The skills that communications majors possess are valued in a number of related professions. The following is a small sampling of occupations that draw on similar skills to a greater or lesser degree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biocommunications</th>
<th>In-house Legal Counsel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development Specialist</td>
<td>Lobbyist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Manager</td>
<td>Medical Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Science Communications</td>
<td>Technical Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Psychologist</td>
<td>Volunteer Coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Working Conditions**

Corporations, public relations firms, and other possible employment settings are usually busy, hectic places. There are deadlines to be met, phones ringing, visitors arriving, resulting in work schedules that are frequently interrupted. PR people and all the other corporate communicators put in long and sometime irregular hours. Once a project is under way or a crisis needs to be resolved, the work seldom stops until the job is done.

Employees of nonprofit corporations, associations, and charitable organizations report to a calmer work atmosphere, but the pressure is on them as well. These organizations have the same need for effective communicators, but a lot less money to accomplish their goals.

Workloads in the different settings will be varied. You could be hired to conduct a week's workshop on effective speaking and listening skills designed particularly for the phone company, and when you're finished, there's the company report to work on, letters to write, phone calls to return, meetings to attend, research to be done. The pace can be exhilarating and challenging to some, stress-producing to others.

**Training and Qualifications**

For any of the fields covered in this chapter, a bachelor's degree in communications provides a good entry. However, while some positions such as assistant/junior copywriters don't require a four-year degree, as competition for jobs increase B.A. or even master's degree holders will have an edge. But a degree is not the only criterion an employer sets. The following skills have been identified in an IABC survey as those most commonly used by its membership:

- Audience research
- Audiovisual production
- Budgeting/cost control
- Communication planning
- Communication theory
- Event planning
- Feature writing
- Feedback system design
- Film production
- Government relations
- Graphic design
- Identity programs
- Investor relations
- Magazine layout
- Management skills
- Media contact
- Newsletter editing
- News writing
- Personnel supervision
- Photography
- Print production
- Proposal writing
- Scriptwriting
- Speakers bureaus
- Speech writing
- Time management

In addition, these other skills and personal qualities become important depending upon the area of business communications you choose to pursue. The more of these you are able to acquire or nurture, the better your chances of securing the type of job you are seeking.
couldn't be made. Having said that, it is true that the nonprofit sector often has less money (and more need for it) than the private, profit-making sector. While salaries in these settings might be lower, the work experience can be equally, if not more, rewarding than in the corporate world.

Nonprofit associations number in the hundreds of thousands nationwide. Under this umbrella fall charitable organizations, private foundations, professional associations, and some educational institutions.

Charitable groups such as Easter Seals, the American Red Cross, the American Cancer Society, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the United Way, YMCA and YWCA, Boy Scouts of America, the American Heart Association, and a score of others need employees with communications backgrounds.

And for every profession, there is at least one professional association, a membership-supported organization joining together groups of people with common interests and career goals. While most new graduates look upon professional associations as a place to get career support and perhaps help in finding a job, communications majors realize that this setting can be the ultimate career goal in itself.

Specialist communicators working for charitable organizations and professional associations perform much the same functions as their counterparts in the corporate world. There are promotional campaigns to be developed, media contacts to be made, employee and community relations to be maintained. Added to this are the activities of fundraising and membership drives.

Growth in this sector seems to be on the rise and more and more rewarding opportunities are becoming available.

Educational Institutions
Universities, colleges, and other educational institutions have a great need for employees with communications backgrounds. Here are just a few departments in which a communications major would be qualified to work:

Admissions—communicating the highlights of the institution to attract new students.

Alumni Relations—maintaining contact with alumni for the purpose of fundraising and community relations.

Career Placement/Service Centers—establishing contact with potential employees and providing career counseling and guidance to students.

Community Affairs/Relations—ensuring open communication and cooperation between the institution and neighboring community, and developing outreach programs providing adult and continuing education programs.

Cooperative Education—maintaining contact with the business community and other fields for student job placement.

Development—continuing the ongoing process of fundraising, targeting other groups in addition to alumni.

International Student Affairs—providing orientation, counseling, and help with immigration procedures to foreign students.

Publications—working with campus newspapers, magazines, college catalogs, yearbooks, and other print needs of the institution.

In addition to being an employment setting for communications specialists, educational institutions also offer the communications major—usually one with a Ph.D.—the added employment opportunity of teaching future communications majors.

Communications departments are flourishing; currently communications ranks second only to business as the most popular major. This means that there is a growing need for instructors and professors to teach the communication skills that are needed in the nonacademic world.

Hospitals and Medical Centers
The health care industry—and it is an industry—has a growing need for communications specialists to fill many of the same roles they would in the corporate world. With changes in national health care policies, the need for specialists in public relations, community affairs, marketing, and other related areas is on the increase.

Possible settings include:

Government-funded agencies (such as the Center for Disease Control)
Health advertising agencies
Hospitals (both private and community based)
Outpatient medical centers
Pharmaceutical companies
Professional schools of medicine
Rehabilitation clinics
Residential treatment facilities
Volunteer health organizations

Job titles and responsibilities are similar to those in the corporate world. The main skill being sought is the ability to communicate effectively.
Foreign Service

The Foreign Service is a natural choice for communications majors interested in business and intercultural communications. The Foreign Service divides the different specialty areas into the following cores:

Administration Administrative personnel at overseas posts are responsible for hiring foreign national workers, providing office and residential space, assuring reliable communications with Washington, D.C., supervising computer systems, and providing security for the post's personnel and property.

Consular Services Consular workers must be excellent communicators, and often combine the skills of lawyers, judges, investigators, and social workers. Their duties range from issuing passports and visas to finding a lost child or helping a traveler in trouble.

Economic Officers Economic officers maintain contact with key business and financial leaders in the host country, reporting to Washington on the local economic conditions and their impact on American trade and investment policies. They are concerned with issues such as commercial aviation safety, fishing rights, and international banking.

Political Affairs Those working in political affairs analyze and report on the political views of the host country. They make contact with labor unions, humanitarian organizations, educators, and cultural leaders.

Information and Cultural Affairs As part of the Foreign Service, the United States Information Agency (USIA) promotes U.S. cultural, informational and public diplomacy programs. An Information Officer might develop a library open to the public, meet with the press, and oversee English language training programs in the host country.

Commercial and Business Services In this division, a Foreign Service Officer identifies overseas business connections for American exporters and investors, conducts market research for the success of U.S. products, and organizes trade shows and other promotional events.

Although many Foreign Service Officers are skilled in political science and history, these days candidates are expected to have knowledge in specialized fields such as communications, the environment, computer science, and trade.

Government Agencies

Some readers may not initially associate working for government agencies with corporate communications. In actuality, the services the government needs are similar if not identical to those utilized in the business world. Internal employee relations and external public relations are concerns as important in the public sector as they are in the private sector. Although the job titles might vary—public information officer rather than PR specialist—the services they perform are the same.

In addition to the Foreign Service, there are scores of government agencies and departments on the local, state, and federal level that utilize the services of professional communicators.

Military

The military utilizes both civilian and noncivilian personnel in a variety of communications activities, from promotion and recruitment to public information and intelligence.

PIOs (public information officers) deal with the community, the media, and with internal communications, usually in the form of base newsletters or other military publications. Intelligence agencies, both at home and abroad, employ communications specialists expert in gathering data and channeling it to the appropriate offices.

A stint in military communications is a career in itself or an excellent stepping stone to the corporate world.

Utilities

Utility companies no longer sit quietly in the background going about their business of providing power. Environmentalists (and the PR professionals who work for them) have raised public awareness to the dangers of potential and existing environmental hazards. PR professionals employed by utilities keep communication open, instituting programs to work with the community, and documenting and explaining their impact on the environment.

Communications majors in this field need to be skilled negotiators, as comfortable with a computer as a microphone.

Labor Unions

Labor unions recognize the importance of building support for their programs and positions. Major unions and their affiliates operate news and speaker bureaus, publish a variety of newsletters, reports, and brochures, and offer educational programs to civic groups and schools.

A communications major at home in this setting can find a satisfying lifelong career.

Nonprofit Associations

The term "nonprofit" is a tax status exempting some organizations from partial or complete tax payments; it never was intended to mean that a profit
The specific industries employing communications professionals included:

- Advertising: 1.72%
- Aerospace: 1.31%
- Agriculture: .67%
- Audiovisual: .70%
- Automotive: .71%
- Chemical: 1.25%
- Computers: 2.89%
- Construction: .29%
- Design: 1.34%
- Education: 5.02%
- Engineering: 1.35%
- Finance/Banking: 6.14%
- Food/Beverage: 1.82%
- Graphic Arts/Printing: 1.39%
- Hotel/Lodging: .44%
- Insurance: 5.63%
- Manufacturing: 5.54%
- Medical/Health: 8.44%
- Metals/Mining: .61%
- Petroleum: 1.60%
- Pharmaceutical: 1.27%
- Photography: .37%
- Professional Services: 3.27%
- Public Relations: 8.06%
- Publishing: 1.99%
- Real Estate: .67%
- Retail Sales: 1.23%
- Transportation: 1.86%
- Utilities (Communications): 4.58%
- Other: 24.07%

Though the distribution appears to be fairly evenly spread among these specific industries, the medical/health and public relations fields were out in front with an 8.44 and 8.06 percentage.

Several of these settings are examined here and in later chapters in this book.

**Corporations**

Many large corporations place communication specialists within their personnel departments or human resources programs. Some corporations also have specific communications departments. In addition, communications specialists are commonly found within various other departments, such as advertising, publications, public relations, research and development, and sales.

**Private Consulting Firms**

More and more, private consulting firms are fulfilling a need for those corporations that, whether because of size or budget, do not choose to hire a permanent staff of corporate communicators, trainers, or PR professionals.

Private consulting firms work with clients on a fee-for-service basis or on a retainer. As needs or problems arise, a corporation can bring in a consulting firm, which will conduct a needs-analysis and submit a written proposal covering how they plan to proceed and how much it will cost.

Consultants employed by a firm can work on a straight salary basis or salary plus commission.

**Private Public Relations Firms**

Public relations firms function much the way private consulting firms do. They take on a variety of different clients, from large corporations to church groups or government bodies, assess their needs, propose a plan of action, and often implement that plan.

Most PR firms are located in major cities and have a staff size ranging from fewer than a dozen workers to over one thousand. Some offices are generalists, while others specialize in specific areas such as government relations, employee communications, or educational and social programs.

**Self-Employed/Freelancers**

Self-employed or freelance communications consultants work similarly to their counterparts employed by private firms. The advantage is that the money to be made goes directly to the consultant and not into the firm’s coffer; the disadvantage is that the independent consultant has to cover all his or her own expenses and build up a client base from scratch.
POSSIBLE EMPLOYERS

Volunteer Coordinator

Schools:

- Volunteer Coordinator
- Volunteer Director

POSSIBLE JOB TITLES

- Community Affairs Coordinator
- Community Relations Coordinator
- Community Relations Specialist
- Community Relations Manager
- Community Relations Director

Fundraising and Event Coordinating

- Development Coordinator
- Development Manager
- Development Director
- Development Assistant

Directors:

- Director of Communications
- Director of Public Relations
- Director of Marketing
- Director of Development
- Director of Alumni Relations

Volunteer Coordinators:

- Volunteer Coordinator
- Volunteer Director
- Volunteer Assistant
- Volunteer Manager
- Volunteer Director

Public Relations:

- Public Relations Manager
- Public Relations Director
- Public Relations Specialist
- Public Relations Assistant

Press:

- Press Secretary
- Press Manager
- Press Director

Management:

- Management Supervisor
- Management Director
- Management Coordinator

Other:

- Other (specify)

POSSIBLE EMPLOYERS

Volunteer Coordinator

Schools:

- Volunteer Coordinator
- Volunteer Director

POSSIBLE JOB TITLES

- Community Affairs Coordinator
- Community Relations Coordinator
- Community Relations Specialist
- Community Relations Manager
- Community Relations Director

Fundraising and Event Coordinating

- Development Coordinator
- Development Manager
- Development Director
- Development Assistant

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- Director of Public Relations
- Director of Marketing
- Director of Development
- Director of Alumni Relations

Volunteer Coordinators:

- Volunteer Coordinator
- Volunteer Director
- Volunteer Assistant
- Volunteer Manager
- Volunteer Director

Public Relations:

- Public Relations Manager
- Public Relations Director
- Public Relations Specialist
- Public Relations Assistant

Press:

- Press Secretary
- Press Manager
- Press Director

Management:

- Management Supervisor
- Management Director
- Management Coordinator
- Management Assistant

Other:

- Other (specify)
Government Relations

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