

THE USE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN HEALTH
PROMOTIONS CAMPAIGNS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
OREGON

by

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This thesis examines how a public relations model can be incorporated into health promotions practices. More specifically, this study analyzes the University of Oregon's health promotions campaigns to understand how the current practices could benefit from the use of public relations. Five interviews with University of Oregon health promotions professionals helped inform my understanding of the current techniques employed for campus health promotions campaigns.

The interviews revealed that the health promotions professionals follow some steps that are included in the traditional public relations model when conducting health promotions campaigns, but they do not actively reference the public relations model or fully incorporate all its elements. By implementing health promotions campaigns that incorporate strategic communication methods, these campaigns will be more successful in reaching students and creating positive health outcomes. Suggestions for future campaigns include creating measurable goals and objectives, narrowing the target audience, using technology that engages students, more student involvement in campaigns, and conducting more in-depth evaluative research.

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Introduction

College students are a population vulnerable to experiencing health problems that can impact their wellbeing (Lederer, 2017). This demographic, commonly comprised of 18-24 year olds living away from home for the first time, is exposed to added academic, financial and social pressures that can take a negative toll on their physical and mental health. For students, encountering difficult health issues can affect their academic performance and impact their ability to succeed. According to the American College Health Association's (ACHA) 2019 Executive Summary, 36.5% of students reported stress, 29.5 % reported anxiety, 21.6% reported depression, and 24.3% reported sleep difficulties as factors affecting their academic performances. These experiences can lead to chronic negative health outcomes that stay with students long after they complete their degrees.

The prevalence of college students struggling with their health has placed an added pressure on colleges and universities to tend to students' needs. A *New York Times* piece reported that admissions officials have seen a rise in inquiries regarding counseling and mental health services for prospective students. There is a growing demand by parents and students for colleges to take responsibility in addressing common health issues and providing solutions. Many institutions provide health and counseling services to students, but also create its own health promotions messaging for its overall student population.

Constructing impactful health messages is important, since it has the potential to raise awareness, create change and increase health outcomes. Effective messaging could play a role in influencing people to adopt healthier lifestyles, to live a better quality of

life and to potentially save lives. However, creating effective health communication is not a simple task. If communication does not encompass reach, attention, understanding, belief, recall, and action, it is not entirely successful (Therkelson, 2001). It can be difficult to get past even the first hurdles of reaching someone or getting someone's attention about a subject because of the digital age of the twenty-first century, where people are constantly exposed to new information from an array of different sources.

Health promotions are ineffective without proper communication strategy. For maximum effect, health promotion campaigns should include perspectives from both public health professionals and strategic communication professionals (Rice and Atkin, 2001). While people involved in health campaigns have traditionally underused public relations strategies, campaigns can benefit from public relations for many reasons. Assessing health promotions from a strategic communication perspective specifies target audiences and their behaviors that can be directly influenced by campaign messages. Thinking about health through a public relations lens allows for a goal-oriented approach backed by research and critical thinking.

Project Description

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the University of Oregon's (UO) health promotions efforts. A series of interviews with UO health promotions professionals provided insight about where or if a public relations model is used in creating messaging for health promotions campaigns. Information about UO's current health promotions messaging revealed how future campaigns may benefit from the

implementation of public relations models. The research results were compiled to create best practices for the UO's future health communications efforts for students. This study contributes to the academic conversation about how the fields of public health and public relations can be better integrated.

Literature Review

An Introduction to PR

The field of Public Relations (PR) is dedicated to effective communication between audiences. In the most basic terms, Grunig and Hunt define PR as “the management of communication between an organization and its publics.” The Public Relations Society of America (2012) uses a similar definition of PR as, “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.” The authors of THINK Public Relations (2013) elaborate further, describing PR as “strategic management of competition and conflict for the benefit of one's own organization and when possible for the mutual benefit of the organization and its various stakeholders or publics.” While the term “public relations” dates to the early 20th century, its definition and practices have evolved over time along with changes in technology and popular modes of communication. PR generally involves background research into the public perceptions of an organization and how to best reach its publics. Then, it is typically followed by a stage of planning and implementing strategic messaging to achieve a certain objective that builds the relationship between the organization and its publics.

The Public Relations Society of America recognizes that there are multiple disciplines within PR, such as corporate communications, crisis communications, internal communications, or marketing communications. There are also various functions within PR, like media relations, content creation, events, social media, multimedia, reputation management, and brand journalism. With different types of

communications and tools for communicating, PR professionals can represent an array of different clients, from the entertainment industry, to technology, sports, health, travel, lifestyle brands, and more. Those who work in the profession produce campaigns for their clients that have a designed purpose, over a set period, to achieve the client's goals.

Although PR can be valuable for creating successful messages for an organization, the field suffers from low credibility based off negative perceptions associated with it. In a New York survey, 67% believed the field did not have a good image and 65% of PR professionals believed they were not respected as members of other professions (Austin and Pinkleton, 2015). However, PR can be used to develop messages that benefit people and their wellbeing. Although the prominent focus of PR is usually on consumer-based clientele, there is room for PR to be implemented into causes that concern social issues advocacy, health and nonprofit work.

The relationship component of PR is a defining factor of what makes the field unique. PR professionals focus on building relationships with organizations and publics to establish *trust* that their work is fair, dependable and competent. Within these relationships there must be elements of *satisfaction*, where the benefits outweigh the costs in the relationship, and *commitment*, where the party believes the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote (Hon and Grunig, 1999). It takes time and effort for strong relationships to form between the PR professional and their clients and its publics. Building a lasting, mutually beneficial relationship is essential for both parties to succeed.

Public Relations Campaigns

A traditional PR campaign has a highly structured format (Smith, 2009). It includes four phases: formative research, strategy formation, tactics, and evaluative research. These phases are then broken up into smaller steps. This structure allows strategic communicators to measure each step of the campaign process and ensures that the messages they design can achieve the projected goal.



Source: Adapted from Smith (2013: 14)

Figure 1: Four phases of strategic planning for a campaign

Phase one of the PR planning process involves analyzing the situation, the organization and the publics involved. This preliminary analysis involves three types of research: casual research that focuses on what someone already knows, secondary research that looks for existing information and primary research that is conducted by those planning the campaign. Primary research can include surveys, focus groups, observation, or interviews. Research can provide useful information to guide campaign development

and helps PR professionals assess the situation or major problem (Rice and Atkin, 2001). A PR audit is also conducted at this stage. The traditional method includes a SWOT analysis, that considers an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, from both internal and external perspectives. The last step is to identify and analyze key publics who share a common interest in the organization. This involves evaluating the demographics (things you can observe, like gender, socioeconomic status, race, etc.) and psychographics (how people consume media and make decisions, looking at their habits, hobbies, values, etc.) of specific publics (Smith, 2009).

The next phase of PR campaign development involves strategy, or the organization's overall plan. This includes defining goals and objectives. A goal is a statement rooted in the organization's mission and an objective is a statement emerging from the organization's goals, that is clear and measurable. Once goals and objectives are defined, the next step is to create strategies. Strategies can be proactive, launching a program under the conditions and according to the timeline that fits the organization, or reactive, responding to influences and opportunities from an organization's environment. In the case of health communications, strategies can be proactive when they promote a specific health behavior or change. There are many types of proactive strategies, including publicity, alliances, philanthropy, activism, sponsorships, special events, influencers, and more. Health communication strategies can also be reactive, in response to negative, ongoing health behaviors (Smith, 2009).

Messaging strategies can differ based on different models that a PR professional uses. Messages can be framed through an information model, focusing on the content and channels of communication, a persuasion model, attempting to influence people in

an ethical manner, or through a dialogue model, involving interaction of two parties in communication. The range of different messaging strategies is immense, but they are easier to choose from once the PR practitioner has already established who its key publics are and the main goals and objectives of the campaign (Smith, 2009).

The third phase of PR campaign planning focuses on communication tactics, or visible elements of a strategic plan. This could include interpersonal communication, organizational or news media, advertising and promotional media, personal involvement, information exchange, special events, or more. Tactics are clearly defined actions that are part of the strategic plan of the campaign. Once this step is completed, the campaign can be finalized in a written presentation. The full outline of a written campaign plan should involve a title page, executive summary, table of contents, position statement, situation analysis, recommendations, timeline, budget, and evaluation plan.

After implementing the campaign, the fourth and final phase involves evaluating the results, to conclude if the PR plan achieved its defined goals and objectives (Smith, 2009). Evaluation is important because it seeks to understand who received the information, what impact the messaging had and what changes in behavior and health outcomes can be attributed to the intervention (Korda and Itani, 2013). By evaluating the effectiveness of a campaign, the PR professionals can learn about how to adjust future efforts for their clients.

Knowledge about how a typical PR campaign is designed and structured makes it possible to evaluate how health promotions campaigns are designed and whether they are modeled similarly. This framework is important to consider when constructing a

successful communications campaign because it is designed to create messages that reach as many people and places as possible (Rice and Atkin, 2001). While not every PR campaign process follows these steps in rigid order or style, the four phases of strategic planning provide a general outline of how to conduct a successful campaign.

An Introduction to Health Education, Health Communication and Health

Promotion

Health education is designed to produce behavioral changes in individuals and groups, from behaviors that may be detrimental to health, to healthier behaviors in the future (Glanz, Lewis, Rimer, 1991). Part of a health educator's role is designing messages that will be successful at invoking significant behavioral change among a population. An important step for health educators is deciding how to effectively reach the target audience and how to get them to listen to their messages (Passalacqua, 2014). Similarly, in the field of health communication, the most crucial element for achieving projected outcomes is to find a way to connect message content and audience need. The definition for health communication is extremely similar to the definition for health education. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "health communication is the study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence decisions and actions to improve health." Both involve conveying messages about health for the public to make informed, positive decisions or changes. Health communication serves as the more strategic lens through which to educate people about health topics.

One of the most widely used conceptual frameworks in health communication research is the **Health Belief Model (HBM)**, which explains change and maintenance

of health-related behaviors as a framework for health behavior interventions. The HBM predicts why people will act to prevent, to screen for, or to control health conditions. Understanding why people act to improve their health is important because it informs health communication professionals on how to create messages that will motivate people to act. The HBM acknowledges that if individuals regard themselves as susceptible to a condition, believe there could be serious consequences and believe that action is necessary to reduce susceptibility, they are likely to take actions that they believe will reduce their risks. It is then the job of the health communicator to create this awareness for the individual through their messaging (Glanz, Lewis, Rimer, 1991).

There are numerous frameworks of different theories and models that exist and are used in health communication. The list is extensive, as there is no universal model for designing these types of messages. There is the **Theory of Reasoned Action** and **Theory of Planned Behavior**, which are concerned with individual motivational factors as determinants of a specific behavior. The **Transtheoretical Model** uses stages of change to integrate processes and principles of change across major theories of intervention (Glanz, Lewis, Rimer, 1991). The **Activation Model** examines individual's broader needs for stimulation and the likelihood that different messages will attract the attention and continue engagement, depending on the audience's need for sensation seeking (Edgar and Volkman, 2012). The **Precaution Adoption Process Model** attempts to explain how a person comes to decisions to act and how they translate that decision into action. **Social Cognitive Theory** seeks to understand human information processing capacities and biases that influence learning, based on our experiences

(Glanz, Lewis, Rimer, 1991). The commonality between these theories and models is that they seek to understand how people think and why they make the decisions they do.

The list of theories for health communication design continues with further examples from Passalacqua's article. The **Integrative Model of Behavioral Prediction** is a tool that can be used for understanding key determinants of a behavior. The **Extended Parallel Process Model** is used to create effective fear appeals to change behavior. There is also a **Cultural Variance Framework**, that focuses on tailoring health messages based on cultural factors. The **Communication Theory of Identity** is a framework for developing health messages based on layers of identity as they relate to health. There are also common tactics that are often used for constructing health messages, including emotional appeals, the use of narratives, a tie to religious involvement, and fatalism (Passalacqua, 2014). While there are a variety of health messaging strategies that draw from theories of psychology and communication, there is a current lack of PR specific tools that can be used for implementing successful health promotions campaigns.

Strategic health communication models can be applied to health promotions. Omilion Hodges defines health promotions as a "communication intervention designed to help individuals become more self-efficacious in improving and maintaining their health." The World Health Organization states that health promotions "enables people to increase control over their own health and covers a wide range of social and environmental interventions that are designed to benefit and protect individual people's health and quality of life." Health promotion is not just dissemination of medical content, but strategic, targeted communication campaigns designed for specific

audiences (Omillion Hodges). Focusing on a strategic communication application for health promotions is important because it has the influence to directly shape human action. No single theory can predict or explain communication outcomes, but the lack of a unifying strategic communications approach should not deter people from investigating this process further for health promotions. (Glanz, Lewis, Rimer, 1991).

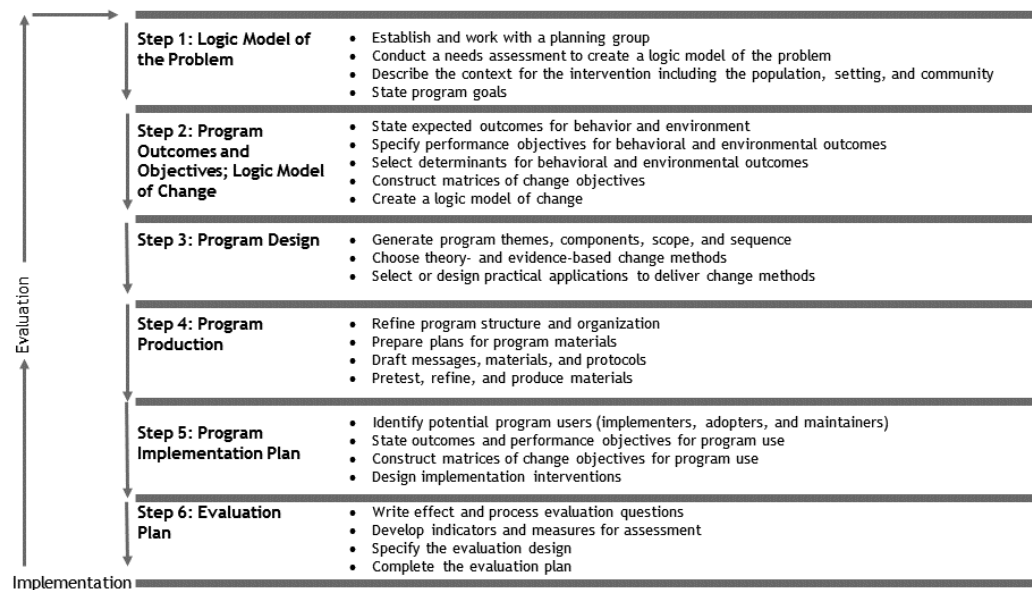


Figure 2: Six steps of planning health promotions

Health promotion is most effective when there is a strategy behind the messages.

Bartholomew, Parcel and Gottlieb outline six steps of planning health promotions from an intervention mapping approach including: logical model of the problem, program outcomes and objectives, program design, program production, a program implementation plan, and an evaluation plan. These six steps are somewhat like Smith's PR campaigns model since they include components of preliminary research, strategy formation and implementation and evaluative research. This model gives the initial idea of health education about a certain topic a structure to follow that is designed to successfully reach a target audience.

Health education, health communication and health promotion all seek to create positive changes and health outcomes for a population. There are many theories and models that exist for the field of health communication and promotion that are meant to assist in making this successful change. While some of these approaches may resemble aspects of the traditional PR process, none fully consider the role of PR integrated with the subject of health.

College Students and Health

There are common misconceptions about college student's health. College students may generally appear healthy because they are often perceived as young and privileged. However, in a survey of college students by the ACHA, it found that many college students experience health problems that impact their well-being in college, which can later contribute to chronic diseases. The age range of 18-24 is vulnerable to experiencing health issues and 40% of the U.S. population of 18-24 years olds are in college. Thus, higher education is an opportune setting for reaching this demographic through health promotions (Lederer and Oswalt, 2017).

Another argument that delegitimizes the value of college health promotions is that it is not the university's responsibility to focus on student's health. Lederer and Oswalt's article explains that while college is about academics and student learning, the very setting of college can create health problems of stress, sleep difficulty, high rates of substance use, mental health concerns, or a failure to meet nutritional and physical activity guidelines. There is a correlation between being in college and a decline in health in many cases, as the two affect each other. For example, undergraduate student alcohol and drug use determines a significant decline in grade point average. Health

choices affect college students' performances in school, so it ought to be the school's responsibility to help ensure student success. Health and overall wellness have been identified as top factors affecting college dropout rates. It is very much on colleges to prioritize health, to have students enrolled in their institutions in the first place (Lederer and Oswalt, 2017).

Health Promotions Resources for Colleges

One of the most prominent resources that colleges use to inform their health education programs is the American College Health Association (ACHA). The ACHA created Healthy Campus 2020, an initiative that provided framework for improving overall health status on campuses nationwide. Healthy Campus 2020 included national health objectives for students and faculty/staff, promoted an action model using an ecological approach and a toolkit for implementation based on MAP-IT framework. The vision of Healthy Campus 2020 was campus communities where all members live long, healthy lives. Its mission was to identify campus community awareness and understanding of determinants of health, disease and the opportunity for progress. The ACHA wanted to provide measurable objectives and goals, as well as promote relevant assessment, research and data collection methods through Healthy Campus 2020 (ACHA, 2018).

The ACHA's MAP-IT framework was intended to be used to plan and evaluate public health interventions to achieve the Healthy Campus 2020 objectives. MAP-IT is short for Mobilize, Assess, Plan, Implement, and Track. The ACHA's MAP-IT framework includes a similar sequence of steps as a traditional PR campaign that could help college health educators craft effective messaging for students.

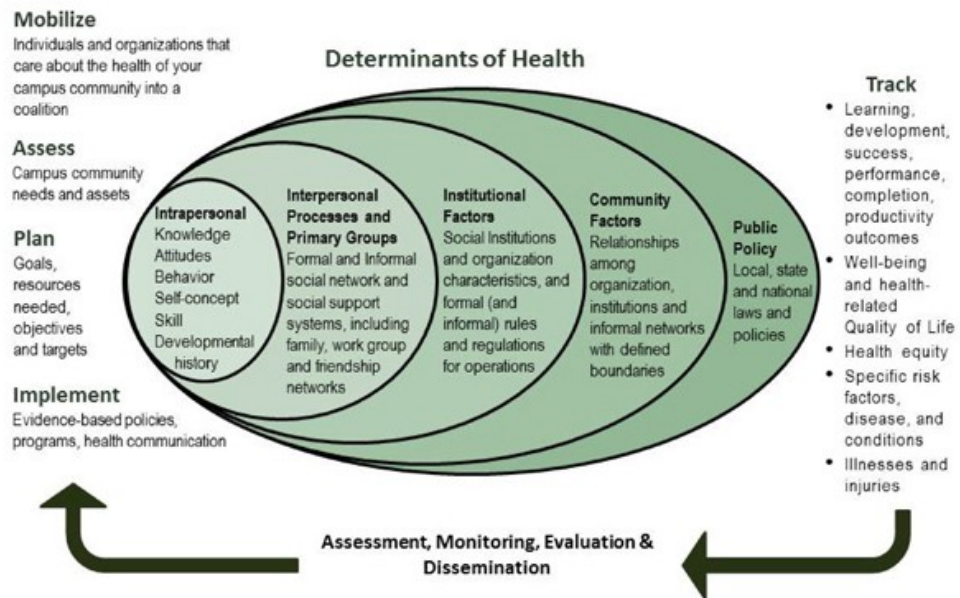


Figure 3: MAP-IT framework from the American College Health Association

Another resource for college health educators is Active Minds, a nonprofit supporting mental health awareness and education for students that recognizes U.S. colleges and universities that demonstrate excellence in prioritizing and promoting health and well-being of students. The winners of their Healthy Campus 2018 Award were Arizona State University, Duke University, Jefferson Community College, Kent State University, University of Oregon, University of South Carolina, and University of South Florida. Active Minds acknowledged the winners for taking a strategic approach to tie healthy campus efforts within the mission and values of the university. The common themes that were found among the winners were: prioritizing a collective, strategic approach, defining health broadly, committing to sustainable systems and policy changes, measuring results, and providing quality, responsive and accessible clinical services. Some of this involved larger, structural change at the university level of creating or merging departments together, while other initiatives involved smaller

partnerships, outreach efforts or increasing accessibility (Active Minds, 2018). A few of the schools were commended for incorporating health initiatives into their curriculum and getting students and faculty involved.

Active Minds recognizes the larger scope of actions that universities take to prioritize student health, rather than recognizing specific health promotions campaigns. This broader approach still provides insight to universities as to what actions are effective in promoting students' health. This knowledge can be used as part of future campaign efforts. In the 2018 report, the UO was recognized for charging students a mandatory health fee to provide access to health and mental health services. Active Minds also acknowledged UO for the "Be Well Blog" that the Health and Counseling Centers contribute to. While the blog is on the Counseling Center website and is a useful source of information, it is not widely promoted to students and is difficult to initially locate online. The UO was also commended for the Duck Nest's efforts, reaching more than 8,147 students since its opening for a variety of programming, like "Dogs in the Duck Nest," meditation and relaxation, healthy eating, aromatherapy, yoga, mental well-being workshops, and wellness presentations by student Peer Wellness Advocates (Active Minds, 2018). The praise for the UO and other recognized universities was not focused on comprehensive campaigns and more on individual efforts that fit under the Active Minds framework for healthy campuses.

The Active Minds initiative also acknowledged areas where there were challenges for the universities in accomplishing their goals. It stated room for improvement in championing student voices, student-led solutions and programming, support groups, and peer educators. There was also a need to provide more equal

opportunities for health, addressing gaps in opportunity and having more cross-campus collaborations, like within the LGBTQ community, international students, student veterans, or social justice programs. Lastly, there was a challenge in providing quality, responsive, and accessible clinical services (Active Minds, 2018). This information is also useful to see areas where colleges can focus their energy on more and improve their health promotions efforts.

Both the ACHA and Active Minds function to provide guidance to colleges about effective health education approaches. Active Minds supports college health education by recognizing successful examples, while the ACHA focuses more on steps for colleges to implement their unique health promotions campaigns. It is important for college health professionals to know how to specifically appeal to their student population through health promotions in addition to using established health communication frameworks.

Common Health Messaging Strategies for College Students

With the demographic of college students specifically, many campuses use **Social Norms Marketing (SNM)** campaigns to address common university health issues, like smoking, drug use, and sexual violence (Dejong, 2010). These types of campaigns inform students about the true norms of a certain activity on campus. SNM is intended to help students experience less social pressure to drink and use alcohol, or engage in the specific activity. This common college campaign strategy gives a voice to the “silent majority.” The main argument in favor of this theory is that showing the accurate norm of how few students engage in a particular act will then make students want to engage in behavior that is the close to the norm and not stray away from it.

While the SNM approach for colleges may work for certain preventative messages, not all campaigns deal with these types of issues. Some health campaigns take a more proactive strategy in encouraging certain behaviors, like promoting healthy lifestyles, including mental health, body positivity, reducing stress, or adopting healthy sleep habits. With those health topics, the SNM strategy may not prove as effective.

Other than the popular SNM theory, there is a limited amount of literature that focuses on distinct communication approaches that have been used for health promotions on college campuses. Examples of campus health efforts, like Julie Sheen's, which focused on mental health support, or Brittini and Cunningham-Williams', which focused on reducing smoking habits, do not provide sufficient information about specific strategic communication methods being used, or whether those types of methods were used or not.

Social media is another strategy that health promotions professionals can harness, with the potential to reach a broad audience of college students. People today use social media to seek out general information and news, as well as health information. Like any type of intervention, the ones that are strongly based in theory have a greater impact than those that are not. The same philosophy should be applied to using social media for health promotions. The beauty of social media is that it can be customized and tailored to fit the needs and preferences of different audiences. This is one way that colleges can target different demographics. Evaluation through social media is also made easier through analytics platforms (Korda and Itani, 2013). While social media is another strategy commonly used for the college population, it is only

effective if students follow, interact and share the content that is being produced (Perrault, 2019).

There are benefits to getting students involved in health campaigns that can directly influence their own peers. In an experiential assignment that required students to work in groups, identify health issues and conduct formative research to construct health messages, community partners saw a positive impact. Teaching students the skills to construct health campaigns can prepare them for futures in many different fields, like health, advertising, education, PR, and other communication fields (Neuberger, 2017). Student involvement in creating the health messaging for college students is mutually beneficial for the students working on campaigns and for the general student population that it is meant to reach.

To effectively reach a college student population, health promotions professionals can implement strategic approaches that are creative and innovative. One example of that is with the “Condom Fairy Program” which is a mail-order service for condoms and sexual health supplies. Discreet packaging and delivery services were tactics to make this type of health promotion more accessible to students. In a study that evaluated the efficiency of a mail-order delivery program, 46,980 condoms were distributed over a six-semester period and 73.9% of participants reported they used the condoms provided. These findings support the effectiveness of the program and schools like Boston University and the University of Georgia have since adopted it (Butler, 2019). There is no universal approach on how to successfully reach college students. This further stresses the importance of implementing traditional public relations

strategies to effectively evaluate which types of messages will work for the given audience and health topic.

Health Communications and PR

Assessing health promotions from a strategic communication perspective specifies target audiences and target behaviors, that can be directly influenced by campaign messages. Health campaigns may have the important perspective of a health professional, but not as prominent of a perspective of a strategic communications professional. As a result, a limited variety of strategies have typically been used in health communications. Rice and Atkin argue that “disciplined diversification can yield greater success in health campaigns, by using a broader set of communication tactics that ‘are coordinated in a more conceptually sophisticated manner and guided by formative research.’” This article emphasizes that health campaigners have traditionally underused PR strategies. A PR approach is designed to disseminate messages to reach as many people as possible. This means that it would be useful to skillfully employ PR strategies for generating coverage on a topic and for creating a successful campaign.

Implementing PR into health promotions helps ensure clear and concise sets of messages that are built around a strong call to action. Thomas argues, “Public relations approaches can help frame the message by providing more content than what advertising can deliver, conveying to people not what to think but what to think about.” Health promotions can use traditional PR frameworks for their own approach. Omilion Hodges states that, “Public relations rests on a century of evidence-based and theoretically grounded precedents that make it an ideal vehicle for the delivery of health information and promotion. Those who wish to forward successful health promotion

campaigns may look at fundamental public relations practices such as targeted messaging, reliance on social norms, and employment of social media” (Omilion Hodges, 2014). In the Encyclopedia of Health Communication, Omilion Hodges also refers to the helpful RACE approach, or research, action, communication, and evaluation. Similarly, there is the RPIE approach, of research, planning, implementation, evaluation. This approach emphasizes the importance of planning before communicating. Employment of PR techniques can be used to help identify health aspirations and communicate useful health information. PR and health communication techniques can be coupled together to create strong, impactful messages for the target population.

Health promotions professionals often have a vision of what health changes they want to see, but can sometimes lack the direction to execute these messages. Jones states that, “public health agencies do a good job creating solutions, but they fall short communicating their approaches and successes.” But there are ways to integrate PR into public health. The arguably most important component is conducting audience research prior to rolling out a campaign to help identify targeted channels for effective outreach. This should consider audience demographics and cultural considerations. It is important to name and brand a campaign, dig deep to determine the core concept, develop strong messaging, and tie the project to a main purpose. Then, professionals should create materials that inform the public. That could include fact sheets, social media messages, blog entries, newsletter content or more digital materials, like well-designed charts or infographics. This could also include developing a strategy for working with partner organizations and key opinion leaders (Jones, 2018). These steps are common to PR

professionals, but can easily be used by health communicators as well to ensure successful campaigns.

Current Health Messaging for College Students at the University of Oregon

The UO has its own health promotions department within the Health Center that plans and implements its health promotions campaigns for students. Within the department, there are several health professionals who decide what campaigns they want to create for the student population based on prevalent health issues on campus. One of the most prominent campaigns for the 2019-2020 academic year is Protection Connection, aimed to enhance sexual health, which involved several stations on campus for students to access free sexual health supplies. Protection Connection also involves a similar component as “The Condom Fairy” at other colleges, mailing safe sex supplies to students in the residence halls with discreet packaging. The health promotions department’s newest campaign is focused on anti-vaping or anti-juuling, with hashtag #DitchJuulUO. It involves digital displays and sidewalk clings of a “juul monster” that is meant to catch students’ eyes and educate them on the negative aspects of nicotine. Both campaigns feature interactive elements and are meant to address health issues that are prevalent for the UO student population.

Within the same umbrella, the Counseling Center also has its own unique health promotions efforts (University of Oregon, 2020). Many of them center around mental health, such as Mental Health Month in May, suicide prevention efforts or the Stress Less campaign that provides students with opportunities to pause and de-stress during finals week. Others include the Body Love Society and All Sizes Fit efforts to promote body positivity and acceptance. Another separate wing of health promotions is the Duck

Nest, which is a wellness center located in the student union that functions as a safe space to come and relax, take workshops and get resources on mental health.

The UO promotes its health promotions efforts differently depending on the campaign. While some are implemented to reach students in person, like Protection Connection and the anti-juuling campaign, others efforts are promoted only through the Health and Counseling Center websites or blog. The Health Center and the Counseling Center both have social media accounts on Instagram and Facebook, but they do not have a large student following or engagement. As of May 2020, the Health Center's Instagram has 180 followers and 1,028 likes on its Facebook page. The Counseling Center's Instagram has 776 followers, and is slightly more active with posting, and 790 likes on its Facebook page. The Duck Nest is also a bit more active presence on social media than the Health Center, with 735 Instagram followers and 1,169 likes on its Facebook page as of May 2020. The UO also has a podcast called "Flock Talk," that began in June 2019, which discusses the transition to college life for students and families (University of Oregon, 2019). There are two episodes where they covered the Health Center and the Counseling Center, "Episode 7: University Counseling Center" and "Episode 8: University Health Center," both from September 2019. The episodes went into detail about the different services and resources for students on campus to help with health and wellness.

With the UO's health promotions efforts, there are some elements of student involvement in the messaging. The Duck Nest recruits both paid and volunteer students to be Peer Wellness Advocates and to play a role on the wellness outreach to the rest of the student population. The Counseling Center has a similar entity with its Student

Advisory Board of students who help with health messaging decisions and implementation. However, the main health promotions department does not consistently have a specified student team that helps with its efforts. There have been several instances of PR and Advertising students being involved in UO's health promotions campaigns. For the 2017 Bateman Competition, PR majors worked on a campaign to change views of mental health (Ripley, 2017), and the department is currently seeking the guidance of Allen Hall Advertising students for Protection Connection messaging.

There are a few other departments on campus that also conduct their own health messaging separate from the main health promotions department. The Student Recreation Center creates its own programming to promote health and fitness and support inclusivity of body types. The Dean of Students also has its own efforts that encompass sexual violence prevention on campus. Sexual violence prevention is also a large topic covered on the UO campus through educational programs, such as "Get Explicit" for incoming students or through the Fraternity and Sorority Life's Sexual Violence Prevention Board.

Research Questions

My literature review provided a background of public relations, health communication and health promotions for college students. In this thesis, I propose the following questions to guide the research process as I conduct interviews to investigate UO's health promotions campaigns:

- To what extent does the University of Oregon's health promotions efforts currently use PR/strategic communication techniques?
- How can the University of Oregon's health promotions campaigns benefit from the implementation of a PR/strategic communication model?

Methods

Interviews

To address the research questions of this study, I conducted IRB-approved human subject research in the form of interviews. I interviewed five UO health promotions professionals about how they plan, implement and evaluate health promotions campaigns on campus for the student population. Three of the health professionals worked directly on health promotions through the University Health Center, while one worked under the Counseling Center and another through the Duck Nest. Although there were only five interviews, my reach was comprehensive since I interviewed all the health promotions professionals within the Health Center and Counseling Center, which fell within the scope of the work I was investigating.

My primary thesis advisor, Professor Autumn Shafer, has worked with some of the UO health promotions staff for health communication research and introduced me to two of those contacts via email. I recruited those first two subjects via email and they referred me to their other colleagues for the rest of the interviews. All the recruitment was done via email correspondence, since there was an exact, limited number of subjects I needed to reach.

Each interview was conducted in person on the UO campus. The subjects who were interviewed signed a consent form beforehand. I did not use the individual names to maintain the anonymity of the participants. I conducted the interviews over the end of fall term 2019 and the beginning half of winter term 2020. The interviews ranged from 20-30 minutes each and were recorded and transcribed through the iPhone app Temi.

The interviews were comprised of a set of questions about preliminary campaign work, message creation and implementation and post-campaign evaluation. Each of the questions encompassed aspects of traditional PR campaigns to determine if UO health promotions work follows a similar model. The full set of interview questions can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

To analyze the qualitative data, I used a systematic and well-documented process of coding and interpreting my findings. I created codes for each content section that determined if the subjects were implementing strategic communication techniques into their campaigns. I also coded to identify the motivations and barriers of the subjects' health promotions tactics and to determine if there were inconsistencies between responses. From the interview data, I identified five main areas where the health promotions professionals commented on a gap of strategic communication techniques in their campaigns, that informed my suggestions for best practices later in the thesis. I have pulled direct quotes to support these findings but did not include names to ensure the subject's privacy.

Results

Preliminary Campaign Work

The first series of questions asked in the interviews were about preliminary campaign work. Each question was asked to better understand how the UO decides why they want to create a campaign, what they want to accomplish with a campaign and who they want to target their campaigns towards.

The health promotions professionals cited the American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment as a tool that they use in deciding what campaigns they want to implement for students. The UO participates in the assessment every two years, which helps when "looking at different health behaviors but also students' perceptions about different health topics." One health promotions professional also mentioned that they try to connect with UO students to "find out what their experiences are and make sure that the data is matching what our students are perceiving." This sometimes includes their own original data collection to inform them about current student health needs.

Meanwhile, the Duck Nest health professional does not have as much direction on choosing campaigns since it is a peer-to-peer space where students have a large say in what campaigns to conduct. Similarly, within the Counseling Center, there is a Student Advisory board which helps determine what campaigns to pursue. The professionals there use a Healthy Minds Survey done at the university level to inform their campaigns. There is more peer input into what goes into campaigns within the Counseling Center and the Duck Nest rather than the main Health Promotions

department. The health professionals also mentioned that they have internal conversations about if campaigns will fit into the UO's mission, which guides their overall decision-making.

For preliminary campaign research, the health professionals conduct secondary research by reading journals and articles, referencing other university model programs and examining larger data on college students. The health professionals sometimes conduct primary research through surveys, listening sessions or interviews. The Duck Nest does not typically conduct preliminary research and instead leans on its Peer Wellness advocates to determine what topics and messages should be addressed.

When asked about how UO health professionals set goals for a campaign, several cited the ACHA's 2020 goals. These are broader goals set by the association about how to make campuses healthier over a ten-year span, ending in 2020. The Duck Nest forms goals more specifically around how to reach students through different social media platforms. For the Duck Nest, their philosophy behind framing many of their goals through an interactive medium, like social media is that, "Communication should be back and forth between the receiver of the information and the person giving it because the base of it is that everyone has knowledge to contribute. Not just one-way communication." The health professional there also explained how, "we have developed documents to try and delineate what the different goals are for different platforms." This type of goal is unique to the Duck Nest and was not mentioned among the other health professionals. One health promotions professional commented that the broad goal that their department strives for in every campaign "is about reaching more students," and "all of our goals are around increasing health and wellness."

The health professional's budgets vary depending on the resources needed for each health campaign. One program could range from a budget of a few hundred dollars up to \$5,000 based on the materials needed to implement it. The health promotions department also relies on UO's central marketing to decide on much of outward facing communication and pays marketing \$100,000 a year for its services, including the production of most promotions materials, like digital displays, posters, sidewalk-clings, and overall messaging. The Counseling Center receives \$100,000 a year in grants for suicide prevention efforts and the Duck Nest receives a \$100,000 gift each year from Pacific Source to cover everything within the Duck Nest. Some of the money that the health promotions department receives comes from grants from the state. Protection Connection supplies fall under that category.

There are several theories and models that the health promotions staff referenced using when formulating their own campaigns. The Stages of Change model, Socio-Ecological model and Behavior Change theory were cited as well as the American College Health Association's MAP-IT tool for its Healthy Campus 2020 goals. Two of the health professionals emphasized the importance of the Socio-Ecological Model as their main driving theory because "it covers every layer of influence that we want to be targeting for our students." However, for health professionals in the Counseling Center and the Duck Nest, they did not mention the use of theories or models in their preliminary work.

Responses about how health professionals decide on their target audience were inconsistent. The health professionals agree that they work actively to embed diversity and inclusion into their reach, but do not always focus on specific demographics. While

some referenced campaigns, such as Body Love and Protection Connection, that focus on targeting a specific gender or grade level of the student population, one of the health professionals noted that their department:

historically has not been very good or successful targeting messages because there tends to be a lot of pressure to appeal to everyone. Our messaging gets watered down a little bit because we can't be as effective by targeting the groups that we want to when it comes to a particular campaign. There tends to be a lack of understanding in our department about what the value would be of being able to really target a message towards a group of people versus trying to appeal to everyone.

While the health promotions professionals generally agree upon the same broad set of preliminary research methods and goals for UO students, there are uncertainties about how to tailor campaigns to specific audiences.

Message Creation and Implementation

In the second part of the interviews, the health promotions professionals were asked about the process of message creation and implementation. The health promotions professionals stated that they often take recommendations and require approval from the UO's central marketing team about the format and message style of campaigns. When asked about specific message creation one professional commented:

Based on our limitation working with central marketing, they really determine it for us. They give us a suite of resources, like "We can put this in poster format, can do this in a digital display. Here's a few things we can use on your social." It feels very prescriptive and the same for everything. With Protection Connection, we have slightly more freedom. We need to change people's beliefs and their social norms around it. So we need some more nuanced communication strategies. In that case, our central marketing gave us permission to work with that, so we could have student-to-student based campaigns.

For the main Health Promotions department, the health professionals typically rely on central marketing unless they are granted approval for student-based campaigns. The Duck Nest takes on its message creation process independent of central marketing, planning their own social media or creative tabling events. The Counseling Center also uses central marketing, but first turns to its Student Advisory Board of about 15 members for recommendations about message types. Health promotions tactics can vary from digital displays, posters, tabling, social media and events. The Duck Nest has the most interactive events directly including students and implementing educational messaging around fun activities, like cookie decorating around sex positivity. A unifying strategy across UO's health promotions is to provide safe messaging and not use stigmatized language.

When asked about technology, the health promotions professionals acknowledged that their general Health Center social media is not a primary tool they use or very robust. The Duck Nest's social media is typically the most active account among the Health Center or Counseling Center. One health professional added that, "We are starting to explore apps that address some of the issues that we're targeting so that we can have another avenue for reaching students. But none of those have been rolled out yet." The Health Center used to have a sexual wellness app called Sex Positive, but it was discontinued when the person running it left the UO. Other online tools that are used are the evidence-based interventions that all incoming students are exposed to and required to complete regarding alcohol, drugs and sexual violence prevention.

Answers regarding the timeline of health promotions campaigns were similar, including preliminary research, devising a strategic plan, then implementing it. The health professionals rarely mentioned the component about evaluation other than using pre-tests and post-tests for interventions. One health promotions professional commented, “I’m challenged by this question because I feel that we don’t really do campaigns in the hard and fast sense of it.” In many cases, their department focuses more on implementing long-term programs or interventions, rather than framing it as a campaign on a structured timeline. Some of the campaigns have no projected end date, like Protection Connection. Campaigns can be created and implemented, like the new anti-juuling campaign, without a projected end date but with an intention to measure impact after a year’s time and then revamp the campaign if needed. Others like All Sizes Fit or May Mental Health month, are only implemented for a few set weeks or month during the year.

Post-Campaign Evaluation

The last set of questions were posed to learn how post-campaign evaluation is administered, how the health promotions professionals believe messaging can be improved for future campaigns and what current limitations the department faces when conducting campaigns. After the campaigns are finished, the health promotions professionals will evaluate with post-tests or by looking at attendance if the initiative was an education or skill-building program or intervention. With current evaluation, there is a framework of testing knowledge, attitude, beliefs, and behaviors, or KABS, that the health professionals will sometimes use. But evaluation is not always practiced and it depends on the scale of the intervention and the data sources available. When

asked about the evaluation one health professional commented, “Do we do it as religiously as I wish? No, we know we need to do more of it. It takes a lot of time and resources to do it.” Another health professional had a similar statement, “One of our goals is we want to do more of it. We would ideally like to be at a place where we are testing all our messages related to their health messages. Like I said, our marketing right now is so generic.”

The Duck Nest tracks the number of students and demographic information of visitors by scanning student IDs and reaches around 3,000 people a year through tabling and outreach events. The health promotions professionals have also tracked the number of Protection Connection items taken and have found that they have distributed over 18,000 external condoms. With both the Duck Nest and Protection Connection, the professionals can track who is using their services, but there is no data beyond that about the impact of their services in improving people’s health or preventing STDs. The same occurs for in-person events, like Body Love Society, the All Sizes Fit art gala or mental health summits, where attendance is tracked but impact is difficult to measure and not evaluated.

The health promotions professionals agreed that some messaging could be improved by going beyond purely advertising certain services, making topics more relevant for students and inspiring change. A few of the health professionals acknowledged a limited capacity of staff and inconsistency in messaging that is affecting the impact of campaigns. Most of the health promotions professionals added that they hope to transition more campaigns to student-run communications with groups like Allen Hall Advertising (AHA), who are currently helping with the messaging for

Protection Connection. One of the subjects commented, “I think that we always can use communities to help us amplify our messages. I’m a firm believer from a public health professional perspective that we’re much more successful when other people take on our messages and share it with their communities. That peer-to-peer communication is really powerful.” Another health professional had a similar statement in agreement, “I honestly think that all of our messaging and health promotion should be done by groups like AHA. For our department, if we can start transitioning our campaigns over to student-run communications, I think that we’re going to have a bigger impact on health issues that we’re trying to address.”

The health promotions professionals also acknowledged the limitations to their efforts when working with the UO. One health professional explains that some messages can’t be too evocative or risky because the health department is in the same division as recruitment and enrollment, Student Services & Enrollment Management, which takes on a tone meant for reaching prospective students and parents:

Some topics are not easy for university officials to talk about. They’re not living and breathing it like we are. Extra special effort has to be put in on our end to show the reasons why we have to communicate some messages. There’s always a concern by university officials that something might turn away a student or a parent from coming here in the first place. We have to make sure that we’re sensitive to those needs but also making sure that we can deliver messages and reach an audience and change health outcomes. It takes a lot of energy to do that.

The health promotions professionals recognize that there is concern with certain messages but would like to pursue progressive ways of covering topics such as sexual health, food security, cannabis use, mental health messaging, and safe and thoughtful messaging around suicide. The central marketing process, through UO’s Central

Communications, can also be limiting. There are some strict rules and regulations regarding the UO's brand guidelines and things can easily become oversaturated in a sea of green and yellow. Since the department has a large portfolio of clients, it can also take a long time to submit requests and there is a limited capacity to work with clients like the Health Center. Having a limited budget is another obstacle noted by the health professionals.

Discussion

In summary, the UO's health promotions efforts currently use PR/strategic communications tactics in small amounts. Some of the current campaign work does involve preliminary research, strategy formation and evaluation that include strategic communications techniques, but not consistently across each campaign. The UO's health promotions campaigns would benefit from the implementation of a PR/strategic communication model because it would allow them to reach more students and create more positive behavior changes.

The interviews with UO's health promotions professionals provided insight into how health promotions campaigns are created, implemented and evaluated. With the preliminary stages of campaign planning, the professionals consult useful resources for college health communications, like the American College Health Association. The UO's involvement in the National College Health Assessment and Healthy Campus 2020 goals allows the professionals to benchmark their work and follow a guide for successful progress. The health promotions professionals also base their work on established health education theories and models, which can be helpful for creating strategies that invoke change. While these preliminary steps provide a foundation for the health professionals, the department tends to establish broad goals and target audiences. There is the unified goal to increase overall health for everyone, but this does not allow for campaigns to take on a narrower scope that directly addresses certain needs and creates change for specific publics.

Prior to interviewing the health promotions professionals, it was not commonly known how much the UO's central marketing is involved in the health promotions

campaign process. The health promotions professionals rely heavily on central marketing for creating specific materials and messages for campaigns and for their approval to roll out campaigns. While this process is the best practice for many university communications outlets, it may not always be the most creative and effective, as the health promotions professionals suggested. The student-created work from the Student Advisory Board in the Counseling Center and from Peer Wellness Advocates in the Duck Nest allows for more freedom to create messages that are interactive and targeted to a specific group of students to better their health. Overall, the student-run approach to message creation and implementation appears more innovative than central marketing since using more than one mode of communication to reach students. An example of this is with the previous “Ducks Change Together” mental health campaign run by a group of students participating in the Bateman Competition, who launched social media accounts, created advertisements around the Erb Memorial Union, designed bumper stickers, hosted events with the Duck Nest, and sought student and student organization pledges for their cause (Ripley, 2017). This type of student-led campaign is more expansive and far-reaching compared to outreach funneled through central marketing.

While the health promotions professionals consult different resources and apply theories in the preliminary research process, there are not many widespread evaluation efforts beyond tracking attendance or doing post-test surveys. The health promotions professionals stated that while they know some campaigns were getting attention by students, it is difficult to track real change in attitudes and behavior through their campaigns. Change may prove difficult to track if there was not already an existing

measurable goal for the campaigns. Since many of the campaigns also did not have predetermined end dates, that also makes the goals and objectives difficult to track.

Limitations about certain messages and abiding by the UO's brand also proved to be concerns for the health promotions professionals. The health promotions professionals mentioned how they would love to have more student involvement in campaign messages. Perhaps they could pursue the peer-to-peer route more often, while still gaining approval from the UO and abiding by overarching university guidelines. The health professionals could pitch these student groups as a channel to create messaging by proving their effectiveness in reaching the student population and creating positive change.

Overall, the health promotions professionals try to follow a process for implementing their campaigns that is similar to the structure of a traditional PR campaign. However, there are steps along the way that are not fully executed to ensure effectiveness. The health promotions professionals have a good foundation for their campaign process, but would benefit from turning to traditional PR models in addition to health communication models.

Limitations

Since this thesis does not evaluate the student perspective of the UO's health promotions campaigns through a focus group or other method, there is no information about how students perceive the UO's health promotions efforts and what they believe would be effective ways to reach their own population. More research should be done to hear from the student perspective, since they are the demographic to know first-hand about what health issues affect them and how they are most likely to listen to health

messaging. This type of data from the student population is needed to further test what types of messages and channels are effective for reaching this demographic.

There are also limitations with interviewing five health promotions professionals at the UO. While this allowed for useful information about the health promotions process, it did not encompass other perspectives that also play a role in the health promotions campaign process at the UO, like the professionals in central marketing or the student-run health promotions groups. It would be important for future research to evaluate all possible influences who play a role in the health promotions process.

This thesis provides insight for how health promotions are run at the UO, but it does not evaluate other colleges or universities. More research is also necessary to understand how other institutions provide health promotions, with their own unique departments, practices and limitations. It would be useful to investigate the approaches of different institutions for a broader perspective on the effectiveness of college health promotions.

Best Practices

These recommendations are based on strategic communication best practices and should be applied when creating future health promotions campaigns at the UO.

- Create goals and objectives for the campaigns that are *measurable* and can be tracked throughout the process. With measurable goals, you can conclude if the current practices are effective in creating change or not.
- Narrow your target audience for different messages and campaigns. While it is important to want to reach the entire student population, it is more realistic to narrow your scope to ensure that your messaging can get the attention and appeal of specific demographics. With a more targeted audience, the likelihood of being successful in reaching them is greater.
- Consider utilizing technology more and pursuing platforms that will appeal to students. There is more room for growth with social media and the use of apps to appeal to a student audience because the population already uses those types of platforms. These channels are also easier to measure positive change than posters or other hard copy materials. Any interactive features, whether in-person or online, are also engaging for a student audience and create a higher likelihood of attention to the topic.
- Include more student involvement in campaigns. Some campaigns already have student groups working on them but many do not. Student task forces or boards can be effective but also consider student groups within the School of Journalism and Communication, like the Allen Hall Public Relations, the

Bateman Competition or Allen Hall Advertising, because they can provide a useful strategic communications perspective through the student lens.

- Conduct more evaluative research. If goals and objectives are measurable, evaluative research should be easier to conduct as well. It is important to fully evaluate each campaign to know if certain strategies and tactics are effective and creating change. Evaluation can also provide useful information on how to conduct campaigns in the future.

Conclusion

Health promotions professionals at the UO employ some strategic communications techniques in their health promotions campaigns but do not fully incorporate all the components within the PR traditional model. They draw from some health communication models and theories but do not actively reference the use of a PR foundation in their campaigns.

The UO's health promotions campaigns would benefit from implementing a PR/strategic communication model because it would provide a stronger framework on how to successfully formulate goals and objectives, strategies and tactics, and how to conduct effective preliminary research and evaluations. Recall that the defining feature of PR is about building relationships between an organization and its audiences. By implementing a PR model into health promotions practices, the UO's health professionals will build a stronger relationship with students where they will feel like they can trust the information that is provided to them, pay attention to and believe in the messages that will benefit their health and feel compelled to make a positive change for themselves.

This thesis can serve as a model for health professionals to consider how strategic communication efforts can benefit their goals of improving public health. It is important for people in other fields to recognize that PR can benefit many causes for the greater good and make a positive social impact. With the implementation of a successful strategic communications plan into health promotions, health messages can reach more people and make a larger difference in people's lives.

Appendix

Interview Questions

Warm-up Question:

1. What is your job title and your role at the University of Oregon?

Preliminary Campaign Work

2. How do you decide what campaigns you want to implement for students?
3. Do you conduct formative research in the beginning stages of your health promotions campaigns? If so, how do you conduct this research?
4. How do you set goals for a campaign?
5. What is the typical budget for a campaign (or a range)?
6. Do you apply any specific theories or models to your health promotions campaign work?
7. Who is your target audience for your campaigns?

Message Creation and Implementation

8. How do you formulate campaign messages and tailor them to appeal to your student audience? (including the format of messages, like digital, in-person tabling, physical materials, etc.)
9. What strategies and tactics do you use when developing your health promotions campaigns?
10. What technology do you use to help with your health promotions campaigns?
11. Suppose you want to implement a campaign for students that promotes mental health resources to students on campus. Describe the timeline of your campaign process from start to finish.
12. How long do your health promotions typically last?

Post-Campaign Evaluation

13. 13. Do you conduct evaluative research once the campaigns are finished?
14. 14. If you measure the numerical reach and engagement of your health promotions campaigns, what were the results?
15. 15. What recent campaigns have you worked on? Describe the effectiveness of them.
16. 16. What components of your messaging do you believe could be improved to earn more engagement or action taken by students and why?
17. 17. What are some limitations that you must work around with the University of Oregon?
18. 18. Are there any campaign subjects you wish you could cover but can't because of limitations?

Wrap Up

19. Any other thoughts about this project, ideas, or information you want to share?

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