

Insightful Advice from Alumni By Jazmine Wade (BS'12)

One of the best ways to learn how to use a degree in this field is to hear how alumni are using it. Speech Communication alumni, Abigail Raesly and Ken Steward, took time out of their busy schedules to share their experiences so far in the public relations field and give some advice for our soon-to-be graduates.

Raesly graduated in 2010 with a bachelor's in speech communication in the public relations track and a minor in business administration. Originally a business major, she discovered public relations while exploring minors.

"I changed majors because I wanted a degree that would match me to a career field with a diverse range of opportunities," said Raesly.

Steward obtained a degree in radio broadcasting at Lewis and Clark Community College but soon realized that "it was hard to make a living talking on the radio." Still wanting to use the skills he learned, he discovered SIUE had a public relations program.

"PR has a lot of the same qualities of radio broadcasting, but is more multifaceted. It allows you to be expressive and creative through a number of different mediums rather than just talking in between songs," said Steward.

Fast forward a year and a half, Raesly is a communications and outreach manager at Diversity Awareness Partnership. Her daily responsibilities include designing and managing a website, writing press releases and other pieces of copy, copy editing organizational documents, managing social media and branding for new initiatives like the membership program.

After five years in the industry, Steward is director of development and communications at Baptist Children's Home and Family Services. His tasks include website content, fundraising appeals, speaking to churches to promote the organization's work, visiting donors and supervising three regional development officers and a development coordinator.

Both have learned valuable lessons along the way, and they offer several pieces of advice for current students including perfecting their writing, networking and cultivating relationships. None of these should come as a surprise to current students.

Raesly also encourages students to find a mentor. "This is so valuable. Invite and incorporate others' opinions and thoughts into your work," Raesly said. "Request feedback and develop relationships with people that will help you. You're not supposed to know everything right away!"

In her organization, Raesly works with a diverse group of people. She believes that this gives them room for creativity and improves the quality of their public relations efforts.

Steward also shared some insightful advice about building relationships. "I learned that the best way to get a person to like you is to make them feel good about themselves," said Steward. "Don't underestimate the power of a person's name. When you meet someone new, try your best to remember their name and use it. People like to hear their own name; it communicates that you care about them. Remembering their name will also put pressure on them to remember you and your name."

Steward said networking is more than just going to seminars and meeting people. Think of it as meeting as many people as you can and providing services to meet their needs. When you help others, they will help you.

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Newsletter

Even though the advice came from alumni who specialize in the public relations track, this advice is for all students in the speech communication department. They gave an ample amount of insight about finding a mentor, working with others, networking and building relationships. This is very helpful to students currently studying in the various tracks and those who will graduate in the future.