Public Relations (Ontario College Graduate Certificate) Program Standard

The approved program standard for Public Relations program of instruction leading to an Ontario College Graduate Certificate delivered by Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (MTCU funding code 70243)

Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
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Inquiries regarding specific Public Relations (Ontario College Graduate Certificate) programs offered by colleges of applied arts and technology in Ontario should be directed to the relevant college.

Acknowledgements

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I. Introduction

This document is the Program Standard for the Public Relations program of instruction leading to an Ontario College Graduate Certificate delivered by Ontario colleges of applied arts and technology (MTCU funding code 70243).

Development of System-Wide Program Standards

In 1993, the Government of Ontario initiated program standards development with the objectives of bringing a greater degree of consistency to college programming offered across the province, broadening the focus of college programs to ensure graduates have the skills to be flexible and to continue to learn and adapt, and providing public accountability for the quality and relevance of college programs.

The Program Standards and Evaluation Unit of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities have responsibility for the development, review and approval of system-wide standards for programs of instruction at Ontario colleges of applied arts and technology.

Program Standards

Program standards apply to all similar programs of instruction offered by colleges across the province. Each program standard for a postsecondary program includes the following elements:

- **Vocational standard** (the vocationally specific learning outcomes which apply to the program of instruction in question),
- **Essential employability skills** (the essential employability skills learning outcomes which apply to all programs of instruction); and
- **General education requirement** (the requirement for general education in postsecondary programs of instruction).

Collectively, these elements outline the essential skills and knowledge that a student must reliably demonstrate in order to graduate from the program.

Individual colleges of applied arts and technology offering the program of instruction determine the specific program structure, delivery methods and other curriculum matters to be used in assisting students to achieve the outcomes articulated in the standard. Individual colleges also determine whether additional local learning outcomes will be required to reflect specific local needs and/or interests.

The Expression of Program Standards as Vocational Learning Outcomes

Vocational learning outcomes represent culminating demonstrations of learning and achievement. They are not simply a listing of discrete skills, nor broad statements of knowledge and comprehension. In addition, vocational learning outcomes are interrelated and cannot be viewed in isolation of one another. As such, they should be viewed as a comprehensive whole. They describe performances that demonstrate that significant integrated learning by graduates of the program has been achieved and verified.

Expressing standards as vocational learning outcomes ensures consistency in the outcomes for program graduates, while leaving to the discretion of individual colleges, curriculum matters such as the specific program structure and delivery methods.

The Presentation of the Vocational Learning Outcomes

The **vocational learning outcome** statements set out the culminating demonstration of learning and achievement that the student must reliably demonstrate before graduation.

The **elements of the performance** for each outcome define and clarify the level and quality of performance necessary to meet the requirements of the vocational learning outcome. However, it is the performance of the vocational learning outcome itself on which students are evaluated. The elements of performance are indicators of the means by which the student may proceed to satisfactory performance of the vocational learning outcome. The elements of performance do not stand alone but rather in reference to the vocational learning outcome of which they form a part.

The Development of a Program Standard

In establishing the standards development initiative, the Government determined that all postsecondary programs of instruction should include vocational skills coupled with a broader set of essential skills. This combination is considered critical to ensuring that college graduates have the skills required to be successful both upon graduation from the college program and throughout their working and personal lives.

A program standard is developed through a broad consultation process involving a range of stakeholders with a direct interest in the program area, including employers, professional associations, universities, secondary schools and program graduates working in the field, in addition to students, faculty and administrators at the colleges themselves. It represents a consensus of

participating stakeholders on the essential learning that all program graduates should have achieved.

Updating the Program Standard

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities will undertake regular reviews of the vocational learning outcomes for this program to ensure that the Public Relations (Ontario College Graduate Certificate) Program Standard remains appropriate and relevant to the needs of students and employers across the Province of Ontario. To confirm that this document is the most up-to-date release, please contact the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities at the address or email address noted on the inside cover page.

II. Vocational Standard

All graduates of Public Relations Graduate Certificate programs have achieved the ten (10) vocational learning outcomes (VLOs) listed in the following pages.

Preamble

Managing an organization's relationships with its diverse stakeholders* (i.e., those individuals, groups or other organizations that are impacted by or may impact the organization), is the strategic management function of public relations. Public relations activities focus on planning, implementing and evaluating targeted communication and stakeholder* engagement strategies to achieve mutual understanding and realize organizational goals; strong written and oral communication skills are essential for those choosing to work in the field.

Depending on the organization, public relations professionals may focus on specific functions or stakeholder* relationships (e.g., media relations, community relations, government relations, internal/corporate communications, investor/donor relations, reputation/crisis/issues management, etc.) and/or specific public relations activities (e.g., communication and social media campaigns, Web content development, special events, fundraising, etc.). The Graduate Certificate program provides graduates with the opportunity to coordinate and contribute to the planning, implementation and evaluation of public relations activities to manage a range of stakeholder* relationships and issues and achieve organizational objectives.

Graduates build on their prior post-secondary education and experience to perform a more specialized range of activities or focus on specific public relations functions, stakeholder* relationships or issues management.

Graduates of the Public Relations Graduate Certificate program write and edit clear, accurate, targeted copy, aligned to organizational objectives, appropriate for the chosen channel(s)* and to a specified deadline. This requires adherence to style guides and templates and compliance with ethical and legal obligations related to intellectual property, plagiarism, privacy and confidentiality of information, and factual accuracy. Graduates use writing style, language and tone appropriate for the purpose of the communication (e.g., informing vs. persuading) and channel(s)* (e.g., print, broadcast, speech, digital communications, social media applications, Web content, etc.). Graduates also adapt their language, tone and style to engage stakeholders* in a range of public relations settings and activities (e.g., interviews, meetings, internal and media briefings, news conferences, special events, trade shows, etc.). Their conduct should promote equity, inclusion and collaboration and follow protocols and practices for a range of public relations functions. Strategies and tools graduates select to build and maintain mutually-beneficial stakeholder* relationships may

include: communicating professionally and ethically with stakeholders*; managing contact lists; investigating the benefits, resources and networking opportunities associated with membership in professional associations; and maintaining a professional online presence.

Graduates coordinate and contribute to the planning and implementation of various public relations activities by analyzing key stakeholder* relationship and issues management needs, developing clear, measurable communication objectives and project or tactical budgets, selecting strategies and tactics to achieve them, executing logistics and completing tasks. They follow instructions, use knowledge of public relations theory and practices, apply project management skills and tools, and work collaboratively on project teams. Research tools and results are used, and analytical skills and evaluation techniques are applied, to guide the planning of public relations activities and evaluate their impact against objectives and metrics.

Graduates also produce effective, timely visual, audio, multimedia and interactive communications using fundamental design principles, accessibility standards and a range of tools, applications and elements (e.g., cameras, scanners, photo editing, design, presentation, desktop and/or Web publishing software, social media applications, images, graphics, animations, hypertext, etc.).

Graduates comply with and support others to work in compliance with relevant professional association and industry codes of ethics, public relations professional standards and practices, legal obligations, protocols and policies, to support organizational objectives and to serve the public interest. This may include application of principles of corporate social responsibility to public relations activities and the workplace.

The speed, volume, accessibility and impact of information on organizations and their stakeholder* relations requires graduates to monitor emerging social and economic trends, local, national and global issues. This requires that they identify relevant trends and issues and determine the reliability, authority, legality and currency of information and its source. Keeping current enhances graduates' work performance and guides their personal professional development.

Graduates also assess the selection and implications of current and emerging technologies to enhance the quality and delivery of public relations activities and organizational effectiveness.

The need for managing mutually beneficial stakeholder* relationships through communication and engagement applies across all employment sectors and industries. Opportunities for graduates of Public Relations programs exist within a broad range of large and small commercial, government and not-for-profit organizations, and public relations agencies serving one or more sector or industry. Entry-level positions for graduates may encompass a variety of public

relations activities or specialize on a particular public relations function, activity or stakeholder* relationship.

There are opportunities for graduates to pursue further educational qualifications. Graduates should contact individual colleges and universities for further details.

Endnote: The Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) maintains the provincial postsecondary credit transfer portal, ONTransfer, at http://www.ontransfer.ca.

*See Glossary

Synopsis of the Vocational Learning Outcomes

Public Relations (Ontario College Graduate Certificate)

The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to

1. **coordinate and contribute to the planning of public relations activities, including the development of clear, measurable communication objectives and project or tactical budgets and selection of strategies, tactics, tools and resources to manage a range of stakeholder* relationships and issues and achieve organizational objectives.**

2. **coordinate, contribute to and adapt the implementation of strategies and tactics and the management of budgets and resources to achieve communication objectives and meet activity guidelines and requirements.**

3. **write and edit clear, accurate, targeted copy aligned to organizational objectives, appropriate for the chosen channel(s)* and to a specified deadline.**

4. **produce effective, accessible, and timely print, digital and multimedia communications, independently and collaboratively, to manage specific stakeholder* relations and/or issues and achieve organizational objectives.**

5. **use research results and analytical skills to guide the development of communication objectives and public relations activities, evaluate their impact, and support organizational objectives and stakeholder* relationships.**

6. **engage stakeholders* by adapting language, tone and presentation style to the public relations purpose, situation, audience and channel(s)*.**

7. **comply with and support others to work in accordance with relevant professional association and industry codes of ethics, public relations professional standards and practices, and legal obligations, protocols and policies.**

8. **monitor emerging social and economic trends, and local, national and global issues to guide the planning and implementation of public relations strategies and tactics and support organizational effectiveness, stakeholder* relationships and ongoing personal professional development.**

9. **assess the selection and implications of current and emerging technologies on the quality and delivery of public relations activities and on organizational effectiveness.**

10. **select strategies and tools to build and manage stakeholder* relationships to support public relations activities, organizational objectives and career development.**

*See Glossary

Note: The learning outcomes have been numbered as a point of reference; numbering does not imply prioritization, sequencing, nor weighting of significance.

The Vocational Learning Outcomes

1. *The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to*

coordinate and contribute to the planning of public relations activities, including the development of clear, measurable communication objectives and project or tactical budgets and selection of strategies, tactics, tools and resources to manage a range of stakeholder* relationships and issues and achieve organizational objectives.

Elements of the Performance

- Analyze key stakeholder* relationship and issues management needs of organizations in a range of sectors (e.g., commercial, not-for-profit, government, etc.) and industries
- Distinguish between goals, objectives, strategies and tactics
- Coordinate and contribute to the selection of strategies, tactics, tools and resources appropriate for different public relations functions (e.g., media relations, community relations, government relations, internal/corporate communications, investor/donor relations, reputation/crisis/issues management, etc.), in specific sectors (e.g., commercial, not-for-profit, agency, government, etc.) and industries
- Recommend strategies and tactical plans to achieve objectives and guide public relations activities
- Research and compile lists for public relations functions, strategies and tactics in a range of sectors and industries (e.g., media lists, communication distribution lists, influencer lists, event invitation lists, lists of relevant social media platforms and Websites, potential donor lists, etc.)
- Analyze needs of target audiences for public relations activities to guide the development of communication objectives
- Draft communication objectives that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-sensitive (SMART), and aligned with organizational objectives
- Accurately record project instructions, resources and constraints to support the planning process and guide evaluation of project success
- Identify problems that may impact public relations activities, and apply creative approaches to problem solving and project planning
- Draft project or tactical budgets that balance expenses with known resources and constraints
- Select and apply public relations theories and best practices to guide the planning of public relations activities
- Select project management tools to guide the planning of public relations activities (e.g., work plans, critical paths, Gantt charts, etc.)
- Contribute to a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) or similar analysis to guide the planning of communications and public

relations activities
- Identify and respond to the specific needs of journalists and news media in the planning of communication strategies and tactics for media relations
- Source suppliers and follow principles, guidelines and relevant purchasing policies to obtain estimates for required products and services
- Monitor, report and respond to issues and trends that impact the public relations activity planning process
- Actively coordinate and contribute to project planning teams, fostering collaboration and completing tasks

See Glossary

2.   The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to

coordinate, contribute to and adapt the implementation of strategies and tactics and the management of budgets and resources to achieve communication objectives and meet activity guidelines and requirements.

Elements of the Performance

- Coordinate project implementation teams, fostering collaboration, and managing task completion
- Work collaboratively with team members and liaise with relevant stakeholders* to guide project implementation and manage tasks necessary to achieve communication objectives
- Select and apply public relations theories and best practices to enhance the implementation of public relations activities
- Select project management tools to guide the implementation of public relations activities (e.g., work plans, critical paths, Gantt charts, etc.)
- Manage the implementation of public relations communication strategies (e.g., print, digital and/or multimedia announcements, reports, newsletters and brochures, social media campaigns, Website content development, press kits, speeches, etc.) and the logistics and tactics for public relations events (e.g., press conferences, meetings, seminars, fundraising events, publicity events, etc.)
- Recommend alternative implementation strategies and opportunities to enhance public relations activities and align with communication and organizational objectives
- Select applications and tools to track resources, expenses, timelines, progress and completion of work to avoid waste, manage budgets and meet deadlines

* See Glossary

3.   The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to

write and edit clear, accurate, targeted copy aligned to organizational objectives, appropriate for the chosen channel(s)* and to a specified deadline.

Elements of the Performance

- Adhere to formal and in-house style guides (e.g., Canadian Press) and standard formats and templates for various public relations communications (e.g., media releases, annual and other reports, communication plans, biographies, briefing and speaking notes, presentation slides, factsheets, Q&As, letters, memos, articles, etc.)
- Draft clear, accurate targeted copy appropriate for a variety of channels (e.g., print, broadcast, Web-based, Internet and digital communications, social media applications, Webpages, email, text messages, etc.)
- Proofread work and correct for typographical errors and errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, diction and syntax
- Fact check as necessary to ensure accuracy of communications
- Solicit and give feedback and use constructive criticism to revise work as appropriate
- Use time management and organizational skills and tools to track timelines, stay on task and meet copy deadlines
- Comply with ethical and legal obligations related to intellectual property, copyright, fair use, plagiarism and acknowledgement of sources, privacy and confidentiality of information, and defamation
- Choose writing styles, language and tone appropriate for the purpose of the communication (e.g., persuading, informing, explaining, pitching, engaging, soliciting information, telling a story, etc.), the audience and the channel(s)*
- Edit copy for clarity, logical organization, and to eliminate unnecessary material
- Use knowledge of organizational objectives to align copy appropriately for relevant communications

* See Glossary

4.   The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to

produce effective, accessible, and timely print, digital and multimedia communications, independently and collaboratively, to manage specific stakeholder* relations and/or issues and achieve organizational objectives.

Elements of the Performance

- Contribute to the production of targeted public relations communications (e.g., print and digital newsletters, brochures, reports, social media content, Web-based content, videos, multimedia presentations, presentation slides, digital communications, etc.)
- Apply fundamental design principles to enhance visual communications (i.e. balance, proximity, alignment, repetition, contrast and space)
- Work independently and collaboratively to enhance the effectiveness of communications for diverse channels* and audiences using a range of tools and applications (e.g., digital and video cameras, scanners, social media applications, photo editing, design, presentation, desktop and/or Web publishing software, etc.) and multimedia or interactive elements (e.g., images, graphics, audio or video, hypertext, animations, social media interactivity, etc.)
- Manage files for version control, consistency, security and compliance with organizational standards and protocols for communications
- Apply creative approaches to the production of print, digital, multimedia and interactive communications
- Adhere to the requirements of legislation and regulations related to accessibility of communications, including but not limited to the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2004*, S.O. 2004, c. 11
- Show respect for diversity in the production of public relations communications
- Comply with ethical and legal obligations related to intellectual property, copyright, fair use, plagiarism and acknowledgement of sources, privacy and confidentiality of information, and defamation

 * See Glossary

5.   The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to

use research results and analytical skills to guide the development of communication objectives and public relations activities, evaluate their impact, and support organizational objectives and stakeholder* relationships.

Elements of the Performance

- Use appropriate research methods and protocols for specific information needs (e.g., online and library research, social and other media monitoring, surveys, focus groups, interviews, media or environmental scan, etc.)
- Select data sources (e.g., stakeholders*, news and current events, databases, social media, industry and government reports, etc.) to guide the planning, implementation and evaluation of public relations activities
- Collect and analyze data on stakeholder* attitudes, opinions, expectations, satisfaction and/or perceptions of an organization's qualities, operations and reputation to support the planning and evaluation of public relations activities
- Evaluate the impact of public relations activities against objectives or key performance indicators using a variety of evaluation techniques (e.g., metrics, monitoring tools, surveys, interviews, data analysis, etc.)
- Determine the reliability, authority, legality, relevance and currency of information and information sources
- Coordinate the collection of appropriate primary, secondary, formal, informal, qualitative, quantitative, formative and summative data for project planning and evaluation purposes
- Assess the need for a competitive analysis to support the development of communication objectives
- Communicate and collaborate professionally and ethically with stakeholders* to gather the information needed to support the communications planning and evaluation processes
- Recommend tactics and strategies for public relations activities based on research and analysis

 * See Glossary

6.	*The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to*

engage stakeholders* by adapting language, tone and presentation style to the public relations purpose, situation, audience and channel(s)*.

Elements of the Performance

- Use appropriate language, style, tone and non-verbal communication to engage, inform, explain, pitch, persuade, solicit information, or tell a story
- Promote equity and inclusion when communicating and collaborating with a diversity of stakeholders* and audiences
- Follow business meeting etiquette to ensure meetings run smoothly and are productive (e.g., set and follow an agenda, start and end on time, prepare in advance, allow equal opportunity for participation, etc.)
- Communicate with others professionally and confidently in a range of communications and public relations settings and activities (e.g., interviews, meetings, internal and media briefings, news conferences, special events, trade shows, etc.).
- Contribute to the preparation of speaking notes, slides and/or other supporting resources for a range of presentations
- Adapt presentation style and format as appropriate for the selected channel(s)*
- Follow established industry and organizational communication protocols and practices for a range of public relations functions (e.g., media relations, internal communications, special events, reputation/issues/crisis management, fundraising, sponsorship, social media and digital communications, etc.)
- Apply strategies to manage or resolve conflicts among internal or external stakeholders*

 * See Glossary

7.   The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to

comply with and support others to work in accordance with relevant professional association and industry codes of ethics, public relations professional standards and practices, and legal obligations, protocols and policies.

Elements of the Performance

- Comply with codes of ethics, professional standards and practices and legal obligations to avoid potential conflicts of interest and damaging individual or organizational reputations
- Adapt to differences in organizational and industry protocols and practices to support organizational effectiveness and enhance work performance
- Respect intellectual property rights, comply with copyright law, attribute sources as required to preclude plagiarism, and fact check to avoid liability for defamation
- Comply with human and consumer rights legislation (e.g., *Human Rights Code*, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19, *Consumer Protection Act, 2002*, S.O. 2002, c. 30, Sched. A, etc.) to support organizational objectives and serve the public interest
- Comply with statutory requirements related to accessibility of communications (e.g., *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, S.O. 2005, c. 11), and statutes and regulations pertaining to the collection, use and dissemination of information (e.g., *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act*, S.C. 2000, c. 5, *Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004*, S.O. 2004, c. 3, Sched. A, *Privacy Act*, R.S.C. 1975, c. P-21, *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. F.31, etc.)
- Set an example of appropriate behaviour in the workplace to support others to avoid the consequences of unethical, unprofessional and illegal conduct
- Use organizational behaviour theories to promote an ethical and professional workplace culture
- Assess appropriate responses to public relations ethical issues and dilemmas
- Apply principles of corporate social responsibility and work in ways that minimize negative impacts and optimize social, environmental and economic benefits
- Work within established practices, procedures and protocols for a variety of public relations functions (e.g., media relations, internal communications, government relations, special events, reputation/issues/crisis management, fundraising, sponsorship, social media and digital communications, etc.)

8. The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to

monitor emerging social and economic trends, and local, national and global issues to guide the planning and implementation of public relations strategies and tactics and support organizational effectiveness, stakeholder* relationships and ongoing personal professional development.

Elements of the Performance

- Assess the impact on or influence of trends and issues on stakeholder* relationships, public relations activities or organizational effectiveness
- Contribute to informed discussions and report on the impact of trends and issues on the public relations profession, activities, stakeholders*, or organizational effectiveness
- Select and use appropriate monitoring tools to stay informed of relevant trends and issues impacting the public relations profession and an organization's reputation, effectiveness, stakeholder* relationships and public relations activities
- Recommend strategies and tactics to address the impact of trends and issues on the planning and implementation of public relations activities
- Determine the reliability, authority, legality, relevance and currency of information and information sources
- Track issues and trends to identify opportunities for ongoing personal professional development and career advancement and to support lifelong learning
- Contribute ideas to influence organizational effectiveness based on emerging trends and issues

* See Glossary

9.   The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to

assess the selection and implications of current and emerging technologies on the quality and delivery of public relations activities and on organizational effectiveness.

Elements of the Performance

- Select and use appropriate software and applications proficiently and effectively to complete tasks and enhance work performance (e.g., word-processing, spreadsheet, presentation, graphic design, content management, social media, etc.)
- Work effectively across a variety of current and emerging technology platforms and information systems
- Select and use technology to effectively deliver communications, collect feedback, and monitor media for information impacting public relations activities and organizational effectiveness
- Recommend current and emerging technologies to encourage collaboration among stakeholders* and enhance communications within organizational structures
- Recommend technologies and channels* to enhance public relations activities and organizational effectiveness
- Use current and emerging applications and tools to track deadlines, progress and completion of work, organize files, contacts, lists and schedules to enhance work performance and organizational effectiveness
- Update online and digital content independently and collaboratively to support the quality, delivery and timeliness of public relations activities
- Manage online personal and organizational profile and account settings to support organizational effectiveness

* See Glossary

10.   The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to

select strategies and tools to build and manage stakeholder* relationships to support public relations activities, organizational objectives and career development.

Elements of the Performance

- Manage contact lists of key stakeholders*, including but not limited to media and government representatives, suppliers, colleagues, special interest groups, investors, communities, etc.
- Investigate the benefits, resources and networking opportunities associated with membership in communications and public relations professional associations
- Use appropriate applications and monitor account settings to create and maintain a professional online presence (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.)
- Communicate professionally and ethically with stakeholders* to develop trust, provide mutual support, enhance work performance and career development
- Identify opportunities to expand professional network on a regular basis to enhance work performance and career development
- Share knowledge, skills and experience with others to build stakeholder* relationships
- Adapt as necessary to differences in organizational and/or sector protocols and practices (e.g., corporate, small business, not-for-profit, agency, government, etc.) to encourage trust and mutual respect

* See Glossary

Glossary

Channel(s) - The method, means and/or medium used for communication.

Stakeholder(s) - Any individual, group or organization that is impacted by or may have an impact on another organization or its public relations communications and activities.