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Accreditation in public relations and why it matters

“As a life-long learner, I chose to pursue Accreditation in Public Relations to complement my communication skills, knowledge and experiences.”

— Leah R. H. Robinson, APR

Do you have trouble getting a seat at the decision-making table? Are you wondering how to advance in the field of public relations? Do you want to gain more leadership opportunities? Then you’re going to want to learn more about obtaining the Accreditation in Public Relations (APR).

What is the APR?

The APR is a way to certify your ethical and highly specialized standards as a public relations (PR) pro. After applying, the APR has two parts: a panel presentation and a computer-based exam.

For both parts of the APR, candidates are tested on a wide array of PR topics that demonstrate knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA). These fall under a series of categories: researching, planning, implementing and evaluating programs; leading the public relations function; managing relationships; applying ethics and law; managing issues and crisis communications; understanding communication models, theories and history of the profession.

For a more detailed description of the KSAs, go to <https://www.prsa.org/docs/default-source/accreditation-site/apr-ksas-tested.pdf>.

For the panel presentation, you will share a case study that demonstrates all of the required KSAs. First, you submit a questionnaire. Next, you present a communications plan to a panel of three current APRs. The purpose of the panel is to help the APR candidate succeed. The panel is there to help guide you and is meant to be a conversational exchange. It is not meant as a way to criticize the candidate.

The APR’s computer-based exam is similar to the bar exam for attorneys. It tests you on a variety of topics that reflect the KSAs. It’s not a memorization-style exam; it’s another way to demonstrate your breadth of expertise. The exam contains 132 scored questions and 33 beta questions. Neither are labeled. The questions are multiple choice, require two or more answers, and must be completely correct to count toward your score.

Both the panel presentation and the exam are rigorous methods to ensure any PR pro has done the groundwork and has an exceptional awareness of the KSAs. This is why having an APR will set you apart from other PR professionals.

For subscription information, contact WSSDA at (360) 890-5781 or (425) 314-0215.

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Approximately 4,900 communications pros have obtained an APR, according to the Public Relations Society of America.

“For me, the APR was personal fulfillment and dedication to my personal and professional growth within the industry,” said Leah R. H. Robinson, APR. “Because the circle of accredited public relations professionals is small in relation to the overall profession, my network has increased for the simple fact that many APRs want to meet other APRs, so the introductions have been great.”

Robinson is currently a Content and Public Relations Specialist for LeadCoverage, which is a marketing and PR firm based in Atlanta, Georgia.

The APR enhances competence and showcases expertise, dedication, best industry practices and high standards for professionalism in PR, according to PRSA.

Not only will the APR boost your PR confidence and competence, it will help advance your career. As Robinson stated, you’ll have more opportunities to network with APRs who have experience in diverse PR fields. Additionally, professionals with an APR typically gain opportunities to counsel C-suite-level management. As a result of gaining more responsibility, APRs also earn more money than they did before having the accreditation, according to Bey-Ling Sha, Ph.D., APR, California State University Fullerton, who was quoted in the official APR Study Guide.

“Since obtaining my APR, I’ve changed employers and the value of my experience is monumental. It is always a blessing to be appreciated for my skills, experiences and expertise within the industry, and life in general,” said Robinson.

Who does the APR benefit?

The answer is easy: everyone. Public relations is the bedrock of every organization. Not only will it enhance the career of an APR, it will add to the ethics, values and integrity of any organization they help guide. Internal stakeholders and external clients will also benefit from this level of expertise involved with management.

Rakeem Mosey, APR, said that his experience with earning APR has opened the door for his career. Mosey is currently the communications lead at the Bowen Group, which is a veteran consulting firm based in Stafford, Virginia.

“[Receiving the APR] has given me greater confidence in my work and leadership abilities,” said Mosey. “I also believe that once you go through this process, the things you learn become a part of every aspect of your thinking, planning, and how you execute your work duties. I find myself often asking the very necessary questions that aim to improve and streamline inefficient systems where I work.”

APR Resources

The Universal Accreditation Board administers the APR. There are many resources to help prepare for the panel presentation and exam. For more information, go to: <https://accreditation.prsa.org/MyAPR/Content/Apply/APR/APR.aspx>.

Additionally, many public relations organizations offer information on the APR. You can read

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testimonials from APRs on the National School Public Relations website: www.nspr.org/apr-testimonials. If you're an NSPRA member, they offer a \$110 reimbursement for members who pass the APR computer-based exam.

There is also a self-paced online study course that can help you prepare for the APR: <https://online2learn.net/APR>.

“It took me many years to begin the process of earning my APR,” said Mosey. “Like most, I was unsure when I’d find time to prepare and study. Also, hearing about so many people who failed their first attempt was discouraging. The pandemic allowed me time to discreetly prepare, study, and start the process. My advice to those who are interested is to silence your doubt and make a commitment to yourself. It’s so worth it.”

Contributed by Jaime Dunkel, communications consultant