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PUBLIC RELATIONS SPECIALIST, ANY ROLE(S) IN UNIVERSITY STYLE ADMINISTRATION ?

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Introduction

Administration is a human process and a means by which the aim or purpose of an organisation is effected. Basically administration is the same in any given situation, but the aim of an organisation might make the style of administration differ. The Act which establishes a university may be different from other acts in the country and it follows that the university administrator must be prepared for a style of administration evolved directly by the peculiar character of the university (Adamelokun, 1989).

Having made this administrative style clear, one should not lose sight of the fact that universities are growing and so the administrative styles or approaches should also be modified to suit the demands of the present system. It is on this note that one would expect the administration to incorporate into its approach, public relations practices that will enhance the overall structure of the entire university system.

Public relations is an essential component in the administration of tertiary institutions. As a distinctive management function, it helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance, and co-operation between an organisation and its publics. It involves the management of problems or issues and helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion. It also defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest and helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilise change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends. Additionally, it uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tool (Wilcox, Agee & Ault, 1992).

A cursory look at the explanation of public relations given above implies that the purpose of the management function of public relations is to advance the objectives of an

organisation. Public relations programmes must be geared towards the achievement of organisational goals.

Method

A survey was designed to identify ways in which public relations contribute to the management of university education in Ghana, using the University of Cape Coast as a case study.

Employing the questionnaire and interview methods, data were collected from the Deans of Faculties, Heads of Department, Student leaders, Staff of the Public Relations Unit, Registrars of all categories and the Vice-Chancellor. There was the need to find out the responsibilities which were seen by the university publics as most important for effective public relations role in decision-making, university-community relations and effectiveness of communication to the university's publics.

Results

Generally the study revealed that there were varied roles of public relations at the University of Cape Coast: handling of complaints; identifying areas within the community that could benefit from the University's resources and facilities; counselling management

on business issues; developing wide communication network to keep the internal and external public informed; assisting in conducting elections on campus and offering hospitality to university's official guests. It was also found that the Public Relations Unit did not have frequent and easy access to vital communication equipment such as computers, photocopiers, facsimile, which could facilitate their work.

Specific findings in relation to the research questions were as follows:

- The most important responsibility seen by the university publics for effective public relations at the University of Cape Coast was Press/Media relations, that is the responsibility of the Public Relations Unit in providing information to the media as well as other user agencies.
- On the effectiveness of information given to the University publics, respondents observed that communication flow was slow and did not augur well for meaningful decision to be made by the University's publics.
- The registrars and students as well as the Vice-Chancellor welcomed the idea of the Public Relations Officer participating

in decision-making. However, the Vice-Chancellor found it a novel idea.

- On University-Community relations, the Public Relations Unit maintained effective relations by opening up channels of communication for discussion and the setting up of a committee on which the Public Relations Officer is the secretary.

Conclusion

The study revealed that public relations management functions were varied ranging from the handling of complaints to assisting in conducting elections in the University of Cape Coast and that all these management functions were necessary for effective public relations. It therefore calls for a re-formulating of public relations policy at the University so that the Public Relations Unit is seen to be serving the wide variety of the University publics' goals and visions. The unit should be seen to be the nerve centre of the University. Secondly, disparity in views expressed by respondents on the role

of public relation in decision-making probably suggests that institutional programmes to prop up public relations might be lacking. Ideally, public relations specialists should attend all important meetings involving the Vice-Chancellor and other administrators, learning the whys and wherefores of decisions and lending counsel. It is only when the public relations specialist participates in decision-making that he could satisfactorily develop action programmes and respond better to questions from the publics. Thirdly good community relations is important since this could promote peaceful co-existence and enhance academic and research work.

References

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NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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Manuscripts will be accepted from practising educational managers, planners, administrators, researchers and teachers in Ghana and overseas. Relevant papers on related experiences from authorities in corporate business are also welcome. Each paper submitted will first be checked whether or not it falls within the scope of the journal and if it conforms to its stylistic requirements. A manuscript that does not satisfy the requirements will not be sent for review. A report on the article and a copy of the journal's guidelines will be sent to the author. The manuscript may then be re-submitted after necessary corrections have been made.

All manuscripts that are acceptable will be subjected to anonymous peer evaluation, usually by at least two members of the Editorial Board. If the article is found publishable but requires specified changes the editor will ask the author to make the changes and re-submit. After acceptance an article may not be published anywhere without written approval from the Editor.

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computer disk, with file stored in a word processing format (Microsoft Word 6.0 or WordPerfect 3.0.) Report of original research should consist of distinct sections and should appear in the sequence of these stages: **introduction, method, results, discussions.**

2. Articles should be accompanied with an Abstract of not more than 150 words in length, typed on a separate sheet. **Brief Reports/Comments** need no abstract.
3. To ensure anonymity in the reviewing process the body of the paper should bear only the title of the paper on the front page as a means of identification. Authors are to attach to each manuscript a cover page giving the title, authors' names, professional status and/or responsibility post, institutional affiliation and addresses.
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