

UNIVERSITY OF SWAZILAND

FACULTY OF COMMERCE

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

MAIN EXAMINATION PAPER

MAY, 2012

(FULL TIME / IDE STUDENTS).

- TITLE OF PAPER :** PUBLIC RELATIONS
- COURSE CODE :** BA 523 / IDE BA 523
- TIME ALLOWED :** THREE (3) HOURS
- INSTRUCTIONS :**
- (1) TOTAL NUMBER OF QUESTIONS IN THIS PAPER IS SIX (6)
 - (2) THE PAPER CONSISTS OF SECTION A AND SECTION B.
 - (3) ANSWER THE QUESTION IN SECTION A WHICH IS COMPULSORY AND ANY THREE (3) QUESTIONS IN SECTION B.
 - (4) THE MARKS ALLOTTED FOR A QUESTION /PART OF A QUESTION ARE INDICATED AT THE END OF EACH QUESTION / PART OF QUESTION.
 - (5) WHERE APPLICABLE, ALL WORKINGS / CALCULATIONS MUST BE CLEARLY SHOWN.

NOTE: MAXIMUM MARKS WILL BE AWARDED FOR GOOD QUALITY LAYOUT, ACCURACY, AND PRESENTATION OF WORK.

THIS PAPER MUST NOT BE OPENED UNTIL PERMISSION HAS BEEN GRANTED BY THE INVIGILATOR.

SECTION A: COMPULSORY

QUESTION 1 Read the case and answer the questions that follow

CASE: Ketchum Captured in Pay-for-Play Ethical Lapse

Armstrong Williams, co-founder of Graham Williams Group, was one of the nation's most well-known African American commentators. His agency partner, Stedman Graham, was Oprah Winfrey's long-time boyfriend. Williams himself was a syndicated columnist, a frequent presence on cable TV, and an outspoken advocate for the George W. Bush administration.

That is why it seemed logical through 2003 and 2004, when Williams began to campaign forcefully for the U.S. Department of Education's (DOE) No Child Left Behind program, the centerpiece of its nationwide educational standards-setting offensive. Armstrong Williams was passionate on the subject. He was devoted, committed and fired up.

He was also "bought"

Play for pay

In January 2005, USA Today reported that the Department of Education had secretly paid Williams \$240,000 to promote No Child Left Behind on TV and radio.

Immediately, Mr. Williams's independence and ethics were attacked. He was guilty, critics charged, of engaging in "play for pay"-appearing to support a position independently when, in reality, his views were sponsored. The appearance of "objectivity," designed to convince the public that his views were not influenced by anything other than personal conviction, was a serious ethical breach.

Upon being confronted with the negative publicity, Williams at first tried to deflect the criticism."I wanted to do it because it's something I believe in," A few days later, after some in Congress questioned the legality of the contract with the DOE, Williams acknowledged the ethical error of his ways. A few days after the revelation appeared, Williams offered an apology to readers on his Web site:

"In 2003, I agreed to run a paid ad on my syndicated television show, promoting the Department of Education's No Child Left Behind Act. I subsequently used my column space to support that legislation. This represents an obvious conflict of interest.

I understand that I exercised bad judgment in running paid advertising for an issue that I frequently write about in my column. People need to know that my column is uncorrupted by any outside influence. I would like to take this opportunity to apologize for my bad judgment and to better explain the circumstances."

The Plot Thickens

The "circumstances" Williams went on to describe implicated others in the unethical scheme, most particularly, one of the nation's foremost public relations firms.

In 2003, Ketchum Communications contacted a small PR firm that I own, Graham Williams Group, to buy ad space on a television show that I own and host. The ad was to promote the Department of Education's "No Child Left Behind" plan.

Williams's implication was clear: that Ketchum, working on behalf of its client, the DOE, served as the "bag man " to get him to pretend to be objective in supporting the program that Ketchum was being paid to promote. So Ketchum, an old and distinguished public relations representative founded in 1923, now owned by the formidable Omnicom Group, was now caught squarely in the crosshairs of a national ethical controversy.

The next move was Ketchum's. What would its response be to serious questions of ethical impropriety?

The answer?

Nada.

A week after the Williams story broke, the New York Times reported that a Ketchum spokesman "had no comment and referred inquiries to the Education Department."

Industry Backlash

The public relations industry was stunned by the Williams-DOE story and the Ketchum silence. The president of the Public Relations Society of America, while stopping short of confronting

Ketchum's role, declared, "Any paid endorsement that is not fully disclosed as such and is presented as objective news coverage is a violation of the PRSA Code of Ethics."

Other industry leaders were even more categorical. Said Al Golin, founder and chairman of GolinHarris, another industry giant, "You have to be smart enough to say no to a client. You may keep the client happy by saying yes all the time. But it's very shortsighted."

Feeling the heat, ten days after the Williams story broke, Ketchum responded. In an op-ed and interview in an industry publication, Ketchum executives blamed Williams for not disclosing his status as a paid advocate for the DOE. Ketchum, according to the executives, had not acted inappropriately. Indeed, the firm's CEO played down the controversy, likening it to "sportscasters who double as product pitchmen."

Crow Time

Shortly after its public defense of its actions, Ketchum reversed course. The day after a story in the Times condemned it for not accepting some ethical guilt and two weeks after the start of the controversy, Ketchum finally saw the light. In a statement released to the news media, the firm's CEO acknowledged that Ketchum bore part of the guilt.

We should have recognized the potential issues in working with a communications firm operated by a commentator. This work did not comply with the guidelines of our agency and our industry.

Summarized the president of the PRSA. **'The industry needs to continue to promote ethical standards and to look at the application of ethics in a changing media world.'**

Amen.

QUESTIONS

1. What's your reaction to the idea of paying a commentator to promote a client's program? **[5marks]**
2. How do you feel Ketchum handled the controversy? What would you have done differently? **[10marks]**
3. Explain the five moral obligations of public relations practitioners **[10 marks]**
4. Discuss the important areas of public relations that require ethical conduct.**[15marks]**

[Total marks 40]

SECTION B

ANSWER ANY THREE (3) QUESTIONS FROM THIS SECTION:-

QUESTION 2

- (a) In the study of public relations you have already seen different professions coming up with their own codes of conduct to act as guidelines for ethical behaviour. Explain why most corporations have since adopted such a move to establish corporate codes of conduct. [10 marks]

- (b) Public speakers should also understand that a business presentation is quite different from an ordinary speech. Discuss the guidelines to follow when making a business presentation. [10marks]

QUESTION 3

As a public relations practitioner, you have been assigned to write a speech for the chief executive officer in your organization. Discuss the main characteristics of a good speech that you will have to consider in your speech writing [20 marks]

QUESTION 4

- (a) In dealing with public relations and the media, journalists and the public relation's practitioners need to work together as colleagues rather than as adversaries in order to have fair and accurate reporting. Discuss the factors that public relations practitioners should take into account when handling the media. [15 marks]

- (b) Discuss the management functions of public relations practitioners within an organization [5marks]

QUESTION 5 Many people believe that publicity is another way of saying public relations, but not the only strategy. Discuss with relevant examples, the activities that aid in the way public relations works.

[20marks]

QUESTION 6

(a) The greatest test of a public relations practitioner is the ability to manage crisis.

Discuss the instant warning signs that invariably appear when crisis strikes.

[15 marks]

(b) Explain how opinion leaders influence the formation of public opinion. Give relevant examples

[5marks]