

Music/Intro ([00:05](#)):

This is Update-1, the podcast of the National Press Club in Washington D C. Update-1 provides a forum for listeners to learn about national and international stories, focusing on journalism and communication issues, news and politics. Now, the latest edition of Update-1.

Adam Konowe ([00:31](#)):

I'm Adam Konowe and joining me today is American University School of Communication professor Gemma Puglisi, and with her is Jolene Levesque, an AU undergraduate majoring in public relations. We're here in McKinley Hall, home of AU'S school of communication to talk about the Public Relations Student Society of America or PRSSA. Welcome.

Gemma Puglisi ([00:53](#)):

Thank you Adam. Thank you.

Jolene Levesque ([00:54](#)):

Thank you. Thank you for having us.

Adam Konowe ([00:56](#)):

So Gemma, what is PRSSA, its mission and when was it founded?

Gemma Puglisi ([01:00](#)):

A great question. It was founded around I think 1967 and it was really founded to support the students and really advocate for a great academic education for them going into the field of PR with ethics being very important and diversity in the profession.

Adam Konowe ([01:19](#)):

How long has the AU chapter been in operation and how does it relate to the school of communication or SOC?

Gemma Puglisi ([01:24](#)):

Right. Great question. I've been looking at our records and I think it was started sometime in the 1970s and went through kind of like a traditional period for a few years and then it came back again. Uh, but I'm really proud of the fact that uh, we just, the school communication just celebrated its 25th anniversary last year and we're now in the 26th year. And so that means that, uh, you know, the school felt it was very important to start our own school dealing with the field of public relations and how important it was and communicating how vital is that everything that we do.

Adam Konowe ([01:57](#)):

So Jolene, what drove you to get involved in PRSSA?

Jolene Levesque ([02:01](#)):

Yeah, so when I was a second semester, first year student, I got involved with PRSSA because I was a public relations major. So it was something that I knew that I wanted to continue and be involved with during my time at AU. So PRSSA presented some great opportunities. I started off in a leadership role as

the finance and fundraising director. So that was really how I got my feet into it within a semester of joining PRSSA. But I just saw the value of being part of an organization that was based around what I was majoring in.

Music (02:30):

And how is the chapter organized? I presume you have an e-board and people have different roles.

Jolene Levesque (02:34):

Yep. So we currently have an e-board of eight members and we have our faculty advisor, Gemma Puglisi who oversees and then we also have a professional advisor as well who is there to support us specifically with the Bateman competition, which we participate in on a national level. But our e-board is made up of eight members including a president, vice president, membership director, um, finance and fundraising director, student run from director, et cetera.

Adam Konowe (03:01):

Okay. And how many members do you have overall? Are they all undergrads? Do you have some grad students as well?

Jolene Levesque (03:08):

So we **right** now are fluctuating between 70 and 80 members. We've had more, we've had less. It fluctuates really depending on the semester and the amount of people that are aware of PRSSA to say and want to join. Um, it definitely is more undergrad based, but graduate students are allowed to join. And we do have some specifically to that. Our online students that are majoring in public communication as a master student or just students here who are taking classes as master students who also participate in, um, PRSSA. But it is, we see mostly undergraduate students

Adam Konowe (03:41):

And what drives them to come to PRSSA? What are they looking to learn and experience?

Jolene Levesque (03:46):

So we market ourselves as a organization that's a pre-professional organization, an international organization that really has the benefit of allowing you to understand more about the field of public relations and see the different sectors, learn more about each of the different sectors of public relations, um, through chapter meetings that we have, where we bring different guest speakers through different networking events that we host, et cetera. So the benefit to the students is really understanding PR on a more student to student level, but also student to professional where we bring in those speakers and have those events.

Adam Konowe (04:21):

And you mentioned a competition before. What was that?

Jolene Levesque (04:24):

Yeah, so the Bateman case study competition is a national competition that happens every year on the PRSSA national side. And we participate in it every spring. And basically there's an implementation period. We are given a client. This year, it's the us Census Bureau. Last year I was a PRSSA diversity. They

just came out with a new book so we were promoting that. But it's a case study competition where any organ, any of the PRSSA chapters can create a team and it's a team of four to five students that our PRSSA members and they compete in this case study competition and they put together a case based on the client. So this year it's the U.S. Census Bureau. So they're doing a lot of targeting at students, um, at AU encouraging them to take the census, doing research, hosting events to really promote the census at, at AU. And it's a competition. So we get based on our work compared to all the other PRSSA chapters who participate in it.

Adam Konowe (05:16):

Case studies are often a part of classwork. And I know that AU has a class on PRK studies. So how is doing that different from say, you know, this competition for PRSSA?

Jolene Levesque (05:28):

So the PR case studies class is more of a class to learn it. This we're working with a real life client and we're really implementing, um, what the client wants, what the client wants to see, how we can relate to the client.

Gemma Puglisi (05:44):

Right. And I would say that in a case studies class we also look at specific case studies. We analyze that, we look at the history, the strategy, the objectives. Um, did it work, did it not work. And once students learn about all these great cases, like the Tylenol cases and all these other cases. It just gives them a really strong foundation of what, how organizations dealt with things. I'm just listening to her and now, you know why I'm the faculty, the lucky faculty advisor, I mean she's extraordinary and look, she's wearing her PRSSA tee shirt promoting that. So, um, yeah, they're exceptional students and she's doing an amazing job telling you everything there is to know about us. So.

Adam Konowe (06:23):

One of the other events I know that you do is something called mocktails with PRSSA. And that involves, you know, bringing in experts from the field. So when was that, who did you have? What was the turnout like?

Jolene Levesque (06:34):

So we actually held our first, and we're hoping it becomes an annual thing every spring. Our first mocktails will PRSSA say last Thursday. We basically wanted to treat it as a networking event. So we brought, as you said, different professionals from different areas of the field. We add some past PRSSA members, um, e-board members who are now working in the field that have graduated from AU, gone through it. And then we had experts including, uh, Jennifer Collins, who's the presidency CEO of JDC events, who was also the past PRSSA president. Uh, we had Will Rogers who works at Neiman Marcus. Um, we had Jenna Mosley who was a past PRSSA president who works as the international communications manager for the campaign for tobacco free kids. We had Richard Strauss from Straus Media Strategies, which is an an, I was able to connect with him because I was an intern for him a few years ago. So he came, we had people from U Street Music Hall, the founder Will Eastman, uh, the VP of Crisis from Edelman. So we had a lot of great, different speakers that came. We had professors that also came and students could really talk with them, ask them questions, give them their resume. It was a great networking opportunity. Whether you are a first year student looking for a possible internship in the future or a senior.

Gemma Puglisi (07:47):

It was incredible. I mean, it was like the room was packed. And I feel that, um, it's great as a faculty member to see students who are so passionate about, um, you know, the future. Their future and what they want to do. And so as Jolene, beautifully put, um, we had just different experts from different fields, from entertainment, media, event planning, crises. And then, um, as she mentioned, we had former PRSSA students who just graduated with them like the one year or three year, five year period. And we brought them in because we wanted students, uh, to show students how well they did the transit transition from being a student to getting that first real job. And you know, nabbing ed and then maybe it didn't work, but they've gone to another job. And that was important. It was great to have the experts, but it was also important to have those newly students who just graduated. Show them, yeah, you calm down, you'll be fine, you'll get a great job. This is the process. This is what I did.

Adam Konowe (08:43):

Well as a faculty advisor, it must be very satisfying for you though to see alumni come back. Recent alumni who've gone out into the field and still feel an affiliation with a AU, with SOC and with PRSSA.

Gemma Puglisi (08:55):

Oh yeah. I mean, you know, I have to say I was just so moved, actually. I'm really proud to see students come back because they really cared. They're giving back. They didn't have to come. They're busy. They're young professionals and they did not have to come back. And it was, we had such a great turnout with some of these students who came back who said, you know, I'll come back again. You know, professor Gemma, I'll come back, just let me know. And I think that's, again, very important to see that camaraderie in the community.

Adam Konowe (09:24):

You mentioned the international conference and competition. What else goes on there? And how many other PRSSA chapters do you think were there? And it's this, is it in the same place every year? Does it move around?

Jolene Levesque (09:35):

So it does move around. I've been lucky enough to go to three. My sophomore year, it was in Boston. My junior year it was in Austin, Texas. And this past year it was in San Diego. Next year it's in Tennessee. But basically what goes on there, we have about 300 chapters internationally. PRSSA has 300 chapters, about 10,000 students. Um, there's, I would say probably about between a thousand and two thousand students that go a year, depending on where it is, you know, just depending on the situation. But basically at the conference, it's PRSSA and PRSA, which is the parent chapter, a PRSSA. They have their conferences kind of intermingled, but not really. So we're able to go to some of the awesome keynote speakers that PRSA has. This past year they had Bob Woodward as a speaker, but on that PRSSA side, there's different sessions you can attend depending on what your interest is. So one, one of the sessions that really stuck out to me is the director of communications for Disneyland came and talked about their new Star Wars side of the park that had just opened in all the communications that went into it. But there's different speakers throughout the three days that we're there that we can choose to go to. Whether it be, you know, there's more than one, you can attend a new choose or there's different keynote speakers that the chapter that's hosting it, the PRSSA chapter that toasting it brings in and it's a great networking opportunity for students, whether they're networking with the speakers or they're

networking with other PRSSA members from different chapters. But there's lots of chances to really learn more about PR and hear about it from different people, different industries.

Gemma Puglisi ([11:04](#)):

And I think I, I think you would say Jolene that it's life changing, right? It's a definitely life changing experience because it really immerses you with the field and you also see your competition. You see, you know, with a thousand students that are there, you see the other students who are interested in the field and you kind of get an get a feel of, okay, this person is exactly what I want to do. You know? And it's good to see that. It's good for you to make friends and to, you know, meet new people. But it's also good to see the competition out there, I think.

Jolene Levesque ([11:33](#)):

Yes, I've definitely met some lifelong friends at these conferences and you learned about how their chapters implement things differently and definitely gotten also a lot ideas, not only for my own individual self, but also to help improve our chapter in different ways that we can, you know, help make ourselves more known on campus and just make PRSSA well known.

Adam Konowe ([11:54](#)):

Studying PR in Washington is a little different. And teaching PR in Washington is a little different than arguably most places. So talk about the role that you think PRSSA plays in, in PR and the business of PR here in Washington.

Gemma Puglisi ([12:09](#)):

Well, first of all, PRSSA is an incredible organization that does provide students so much. You know, the networking experience, the tools that they need to, to uh, know and they're very supportive. You know, as I said, they make, they have this conference every year. And what I also love about them is that they provide scholarships for students every single year. And those scholarships and Jolene has been a recipient and as many other students have. And I think that's really important. I can't think of that many organizations, right, that's a professional organization in the field that really supports students. And um, as I said they're a national organization, and we're lucky to be in D C right Adam,, I mean there's public affairs, but there are a lot of PR firms. I mean when I grew up in this town, I'm a native Washingtonian. I grew outside of DC and I went to college here. I remember that the jobs that I felt I could only were like either teaching or working for the government or maybe a law firm, I felt like there was, there was like a limitation of what I could do. And you know, when I came back after living in New York for years, it was explosive. I mean, you know, we're seeing Virginia, tech companies we're saying corporations like Marriott's based here now, Hilton, Nestle's just moved back, Capitol One's here. I think the opportunities for students in our field is extraordinary in this town and Jolene will attest to it. And you know that Adam, being an adjunct here, that students, uh, by the time they graduate can have up to four internships. And that is really incredible. I mean, that's very special for students to have that opportunity.

Adam Konowe ([13:42](#)):

So like you said, full disclosure, I'm on the faculty with you as an adjunct, you're a full time professor. For you what's in it for you for, to be the advisor for PRSSA? You don't, you don't have to do this. Do you have a full time job teaching.

Gemma Puglisi ([13:56](#)):

Oh, I've loved it. I've, I, it's honestly, it has been such a, uh, an enriching experience for me because I, you know, you know, seeing students like Jolene, um, you know, start as what a freshman or sophomore, I mean, she's an incredible leader, you know, and I, and what's great for me is to see them come back. Like, you know, as she mentioned, we had a lot of students who were here before, former students who came back and that's, and you know as a professor, it's great. You know, you, you teach, but it's great when the students come back and say how much their education meant to them and what the community meant. So I really always say I'm the lucky faculty advisor because it's, it's really enriched my life in so many ways. Uh, so I, I've been very grateful for the opportunity. Really.

Adam Konowe ([14:40](#)):

Gemma Puglisi is an assistant professor of communications at American University. Jolene Levesque is an undergraduate and president of AU's PRSSA chapter. Thank you both so much.

Gemma Puglisi ([14:50](#)):

Thank you so much, Adam.

Jolene Levesque ([14:50](#)):

Thanks Adam.

Gemma Puglisi ([14:50](#)):

This is great. Thank you.

Adam Konowe ([14:52](#)):

For Update-1, I'm Adam Konowe.

Music/Outro ([15:04](#)):

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