

# Public relations literature and scholarship in Australia: A brief history of change and diversification

Jane Johnston  
*Bond University*

Jim Macnamara  
*University of Technology Sydney*

## Abstract

This article traces the development of public relations literature and scholarship in Australia from the 1950s. It presents a discussion of Australian academic and professional texts from early chapters on PR in generic communication texts (Sommerlad, 1950), to the first book on PR by Thomas Dwyer published in 1961 and David Potts' pioneering 1976 edited volume, *Public Relations in Australia*, to the latest collection of texts and monographs. It also plots the beginnings of Australian scholarly PR and communication journals. In providing this examination, the paper includes two case studies: Macnamara's collection of public relations handbooks published from the early 1980s through the 1990s and Johnston and Zawawi's *Public Relations: Theory and Practice* first published in 2000, which spearheaded the contemporary range of Australian PR texts. The case studies include autoethnographic observations and reflections on the rationale for these publications, utilising Yin's (2009) case study methodology of bringing together contemporary issues or phenomenon within real-life contexts, illuminated by additional sources. These sources include an examination of the literature as a primary source and also draw on selected email interviews. Based on this examination of early publishing history and key case studies, the article investigates the development of PR as a discipline within the Australian tertiary sector, drawing on published accounts and reports plus a brief survey of PhD outputs since 2001. It reports that, after an initial period of largely imported texts and scholarship, growth within the academy in recent years reflects the rise in Australian-based literature and a burgeoning scholarly environment within the Australian tertiary education sector.

## Introduction

This article presents an analysis of public relations scholarship in Australia. It traces the pathway through the early years of publishing PR books and the first university courses in Australia, identifying key points at which the country's literature and scholarship moved forward. While 1950 represents a starting point with an early *Handbook on Journalism, Broadcasting, Propaganda, Public Relations and Advertising* providing a discussion of PR's relationship to journalism (Sommerlad, 1950), the first Australian handbook dedicated to PR was not published until 1961 (Dwyer) and it was not until PR was firmly established as a discipline within the academy that the first text book was written in 1976 (Potts). The 1980s saw the emergence of a raft of Australian PR manuals developed for industry and these were utilised in university courses, along with North American texts, in the absence of other localised titles throughout that period.

During the 1990s Australian scholars joined international discussions about PR pedagogy, research, epistemology and theory, marking a significant shift in thinking from the previously accepted North American-centric approaches to university teaching and scholarship. By problematizing issues such as differing theoretical and epistemological positions, shifting and emerging PR paradigms, and how technological change would affect the industry, Australian

scholars joined international discourses that would ultimately underpin a more critical way forward (see, for example, the special edition of *Australian Journal of Communication*, themed 'Public Relations on the Edge', 1997; Leitch & Motion, 1998; Motion & Leitch, 1999; Singh & Smyth, 2000; and retrospectively, Alexander, 2004; Petelin, 2005).

It was not until 1999, however, that Australia had its first scholarly journal dedicated to PR research, and 2000 before a theoretically-grounded text book was published to cater to the burgeoning PR courses around the country. It would still take several more years before academic publishing was to gain real momentum in Australia. While one UK study noted how US texts continued to dominate internationally in 2008 (Tench & Deflagbe, 2008) Australian scholars (e.g. Hatherell & Bartlett, 2005) were proposing ways to advance scholarship within Australian universities as Australian PR literature was gaining increasing momentum.

Since 2000, PR scholars in Australia have published five general and introductory texts – each being updated with multiple editions. A range of more specialist texts or monographs also have been published, most within the last five years, and this trend has included international as well as Australian-based publishers. Two more public relations/public communication journals have been launched in that time and although one (*PRism*) moved to New Zealand, approximately half of its senior editorial board members are Australian. Australian academics have increasingly taken their place on the editorial boards of a number of international journals and preliminary figures, reported in this article, indicate that PR higher research degrees are growing rapidly.

This article does not aim to provide a critique of the various PR books, journals or scholarship in the Australian tertiary sector. Rather, its purpose is to expand the developing historical literature of PR in Australia (see for example Zawawi, 2000; Sheehan, 2007; Macnamara & Crawford, 2010; Gleeson, 2012; Gleeson, forthcoming) to provide insights into key developments of PR scholarship within tertiary education since it began in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s.

## **Developing a history**

This brief history weaves together data from several sources. It draws from scholarly journals, research reports, historical documents, personal communication and an e-survey, as well as the first-hand accounts of two authors based on their collective contribution of 12 PR texts, monographs or edited works (including new editions). In addition, it examines the primary sources – the texts and journals which have been published in the past 60-plus years in Australia – from which localised knowledge has been derived.<sup>1</sup>

The research utilises a combination of qualitative methodologies, notably autoethnography (Anderson, 2006) and case study approaches (Seal et al., 2004; Yin, 2009; Wimmer & Dominick, 2010). Anderson argues that analytical autoethnographies incorporate researchers' visibly within the field of investigation, with researchers committed to developing understandings of the social phenomena under investigation (2006). This methodology supports the case study approach as described by Yin (2009) which brings together contemporary issues or phenomena within real-life contexts, illuminated by additional sources of information. Wimmer and Dominick (2010) note that case studies afford researchers the ability to utilise a wide spectrum of evidence including documents, historical facts, interviews and surveys, noting the more data that can be brought to bear in a case the more likely it is to be valid (2010, p. 141). As Seale et al. (2004) suggest, qualitative research practice is not a linear process; it involves "an engagement with a variety of things

and people” including the researchers’ own experiences and aspirations. Seale et al. further note that “if practicing researchers are encouraged to write about their inquiries in a methodologically reflective way ... we may learn a great deal” (p. 2). This combined approach therefore chorales together the many disparate elements and sources, including our own experiences, that collectively assist with developing the historical narrative.

The study also includes the findings of an e-survey which provides a snapshot of PR higher research degrees in Australia. Using a purposive sampling approach (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010, p. 91) to seek out feedback about PhDs – either completed or in progress – the findings provide an indication of trends in PhD education in PR in Australia. While not intended as a comprehensive analysis of PhD completions, it nevertheless supplements and enhances the overall sense of where Australian scholarship is currently situated. In gathering together these threads of information in a triangulated approach, the article contributes to the growing literature on the history of PR in Australia, as well as a more focussed examination of the development of scholarship in the country.

### **Early texts and journals**

An early analysis of PR in Australian literature features in the 1950s book by Ernest Sommerlad: *Mightier than the Sword: A Handbook on Journalism, Broadcasting, Propaganda, Public Relations and Advertising*. The book’s foreword, written in 1949 by the Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University, Stephen Roberts, notes: “This book opens an entirely new field because no adequate handbook for the use of students, or those desiring to enter the writing professions, has ever appeared in Australia” (1950, p. vii). Sommerlad positions himself as the ideal person to write such a tome, in response to what he describes as “urgent requests”, due to a career which spanned “every phase of the newspaper and publicity craft, including broadcasting, advertising, propaganda and public relations” (1950 p. ix). Despite this claim, the book is very journalism-focussed and the analysis of public relations is US-centric and centres heavily on its negative impact, with expressions such as “crude”, “crooked publicity”, “bags of tricks” and even “palpable malpractice” describing the industry’s impact on journalism (ibid, pp. 139-141). So, while PR had ‘made it’ into the Australian literature, it was a somewhat inauspicious start.

The first book solely on PR published in Australia was *The Australian Public Relations Handbook*, edited by Thomas Dwyer (1961). But, as the title suggests, this was a practical guide. For instance, contributors included Eric White, a former military PR officer and founder of the first PR consultancy to become national and then international with offices in New Zealand and South-East Asia (later sold to Hill & Knowlton).

The first locally-authored and published PR textbook was *Public Relations Practice in Australia* by pioneering Australian PR scholar, J.D.S. (David) Potts (1976), who later became the first professor of public relations in Australia. Potts undertook post graduate studies in the United States and introduced early PR curriculum to an Australian university (Morath, 2008), discussed later in this analysis. Potts’s text, produced with the support of the Public Relations Institute of Australia, sought to discuss PR within a theoretical framework and informed by research. For instance, in the foreword, then PRIA president, Ronald Plater (1976) stated:

The Institute has not sought to produce solely a how-to-do-it book, but rather one that combines much practical information with reasoning that goes with the research of communication problems and the implementation of thorough, well-directed communication programmes (foreword, n.p.).

Potts' text represented a departure from early 'press agency' models of PR advanced by Hollywood press agents and General Douglas MacArthur's publicity team (Zawawi, 2009). It noted that PR should involve "two-way communication" (p. 3) and broadened discussion of PR beyond media publicity to include financial PR, political PR, community relations, PR for government, marketing PR, internal communication and other roles. Nevertheless, despite its textbook status, the book was predominantly practice-focussed. What is widely overlooked in most reviews of Australian PR scholarship is that all chapters in Potts' (1976) textbook were written by leading practitioners, including Asher Joel, Hal Myers, Laurie Kerr, Peter Golding and Eric White who were the founders and heads of the nation's leading PR consultancies at the time. Potts played an editing role only. The text was grounded in (mainly US) functionalist conceptualisations of PR, affirming that "PR is a management function" (p. 6) and focussed on roles and management objectives. Potts drew heavily on US PR texts including the 1971 edition of Cutlip and Center's (1971) *Effective Public Relations*, as well as *The Role of Public Relations in Management* by UK academic, Sam Black (1972), which were widely cited in the text.

Given that Potts' post graduate studies were undertaken at California State University in San Jose and Stanford University in San Francisco, it should come as no surprise that his text included a US-centric approach. In an interview with Karen Morath he noted:

We have not been influenced very much by the UK. Most of the research, most of the knowledge, most of the text books, have come from the US and the leading academics are in the US (Potts, as cited in Morath, 2008, p.64).

Nevertheless, he later commented:

What we need to do in Australia now is to take some of that theory and that research and reinvent it in Australia, in our environment, in our Australian workplace, in an Australian context. Because we're not the same as the United States (as cited in Morath, 2008, p. 57).

Along with Potts' textbook, the mid 1970s saw the launch of two important Australian academic journals focussed on communication and media. The first was the *Australian Journal of Communication* which has been published continuously since 1975 by the University of Queensland. However, as the title suggests, this journal is focussed on human communication broadly and offers only limited opportunities for analysis of PR. A year later in 1976, *Media Information Australia* (now *Media International Australia* and incorporating *Culture and Policy Journal*) was launched. This journal, which also has a broad media and communication focus, was instigated and edited for a number of years by noted Australian media scholar, Henry Mayer and published initially by the Media Information Research Exchange (MIRE), before finding an institutional home at the Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy at Griffith University which was jointly managed by the University of Queensland and Queensland University of Technology. Later it moved to its current location at the University of Queensland.

## **The 1980–1990s**

A series of practice-orientated books were published by prominent practitioner, Jim Macnamara, starting in 1983. Macnamara says he published his early books because of this "yawning gap" in local documented knowledge and largely "by accident". *Public Relations Handbook for Clubs and Associations* (Macnamara, 1983) grew organically out of a series of internal manuals produced by Macnamara who was working as Director of Public Relations for the National Farmers Federation in Canberra at the time, the peak national industry group

representing agricultural producers in Australia comprised of 22 affiliated farmer associations with 175,000 members in total. These manuals and this 137-page handbook were produced by Macnamara because the only Australian book on public relations in print at the time was Potts' (1976) work which was written as a textbook for students. There were a number of books on media relations including a PR-orientated text by freelance journalist, Iola Mathews (1981), *How to Use the Media in Australia*. However, this focussed only on mass media publicity and Macnamara identified that PR included other activities and media such as information publications (e.g. brochures, annual reports and newsletters), videos, events, government relations (or lobbying) and community relations.

Macnamara's interest in publishing was given its final impetus when he discovered that the hand-bound manuals that he first produced for use by office-bearers of farmers' associations around Australia were being photocopied and used by a number of environmental and community groups, clubs and associations. Somewhat ironically, Macnamara could not convince a publisher of the viability of a handbook on public relations, so he published the first edition through his own business, originally set up in Canberra. After selling out the first print run of 2,000 copies in nine months, a publisher came knocking on the door and a second edition was published by Information Australia in Melbourne, a specialty publisher which also produced the leading media directory in Australia at the time, *The Margaret Gee's Media Guide*.

Soon after, *Public Relations Handbook for Managers and Executives* followed (Macnamara, 1984), an expanded edition tailored to executives and management. After an Asia Pacific edition was published in Singapore (Macnamara, 1992) and a substantially expanded edition of the managers and executives handbook was published by Information Australia in 1996, the audience-specific naming was dropped and the text became *Jim Macnamara's Public Relations Handbook* (Macnamara, 2000). In total, Macnamara's series of PR handbooks sold out five editions between 1983 and the mid-2000s, culminating in Macnamara (2005). The book remained true to its original purpose of providing a practice-orientated handbook. However, Macnamara continued to expand its theoretical as well as practical content, particularly in relation to evaluation, after he gained a Master of Arts degree by research which focussed on measurement of PR. Due to the dearth of PR books at the time, and Macnamara's pioneering work in PR measurement and evaluation, a number of undergraduate courses adopted the book as recommended reading. The fifth edition (Macnamara, 2005), totalling 356 pages, was used in a number of universities as a PR text, although Macnamara recoiled from the view that it was a textbook.

In the late 1980s, two other leading Australian practitioners, Candy Tymson and Bill Sherman, sought to fill the gap for local PR texts with *The Australian Public Relations Manual* (Tymson & Sherman, 1987). While this book was used in some Australian university courses in public relations, its focus also was primarily practical. Subsequent editions contained increased theoretical and scholarly content and gained new editors, as discussed in the next section, but its focus remained primarily functionalist and managerial.

Other Australian media-oriented handbooks continued to fill the teaching void, particularly in the field of media relations. Following Mathews' (1981) *How To Use the Media in Australia* came Hudson's *The Media Game* (1994) which was a practical how-to guide on publicity and working with media. Such books were useful handbooks, but were never intended for, nor appropriate for, scholarly learning and required significant supplementary material for university use.

As Alexander (2004) observed in his study of PR scholarship in Australia, “text books in the 1970s and early 1980s were mostly sourced from the United States” (2004, p. 1). This gap in local PR scholarship was made more pronounced by a lack of any Australian PR journals. The eve of the new millennium saw publication of Australia’s first specialised journal, *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal (APPRJ)*, which was launched in 1999, sponsored by Canberra University during its early years and later Deakin University. The first edition heralded how:

On the edge of the Millennium it is time to open a new front for discussing the role of public relations in society that gives prominence to what is happening in the countries of Asia, Australia and New Zealand (Singh & Smyth, 1999, n.p.).

The first edition included a stellar line-up of academics, practitioners and PRIA executives including Debashish Munshi, Judy Motion and Shirley Leith, Leslie McCoy and Marjorie Anderson. The journal remains an important outlet for academic publishing in Australia, particularly for research into local developments, alternative theorising and international perspectives.

## **PR scholarship in the new millennium: 2000 and beyond**

It is significant and telling of a gap in localised PR development and publishing that almost 25 years elapsed from Potts’ first PR textbook and the emergence of another Australian-authored textbook on PR. Johnston and Zawawi’s publication of *Public Relations: Theory and Practice* was the first purpose-written text for university education since Potts’ 1976 pioneering effort which was, by then, long out of print. The rationale for the book is outlined in an article in *APPRJ* which acknowledged the journal for beginning “the process of allowing and focussing academic effort in the field [with] an introductory text a logical next step” (Johnston & Zawawi, 2000a p.115). Not surprisingly, Johnston and Zawawi cited the reliance on North American texts as a primary reason for publishing the Australian text, noting:

The continued use of North American texts, excellent though they are, poses ever-increasing problems for public relations education in Australia ... the cultural and social differences that exist between Australia and North America require Australian educators to prepare extensive support materials to contextualise material contained in these texts. At best, this dilutes the value of the messages contained in those texts, at worst, it undermines it (p. 107).

The text’s authors cited a Motion and Leitch article from the year before which called for PR to be developed as a discipline at a local level, arguing that “...without such freedom to develop, local knowledges may be suppressed by established ways of thinking and speaking about the world” (1999, p. 27). In their rationale, Johnston and Zawawi advocated for a “robust dialogue” of public relations theories, noting the need to “at the very least consider critical theory in the formulation of public relations theory” (Johnston & Zawawi 2000a p. 109). Moreover, it was noted that without such acknowledgements the worldview of the North American paradigm was reinforced and seen as being “better” than “alternative versions”. In addition, they argued that the PRIA held expectations (in its accreditation process) that local knowledge should be utilised in the rapidly expanding array of PR courses within local tertiary institutions. Johnston and Zawawi (2000a p. 110) stated:

The overwhelming indication of this body of research data was that an introductory text book, written by Australian educators for use in a non-North American environment, was needed. Introductory because, in order to break free from a dominant North American paradigm, it is necessary for students to be exposed to a localised narrative from the very beginning.

Collaborative because a great deal of work and a great deal of expertise is already available located in universities around the country.

It was this collaboration that clinched the progression of the book; the idea that the text should draw upon the expertise of a range of academics as well as leading professionals, citing Australian case studies, examples and laws, plus a summary chapter of public relations and communications theories. Its key objectives were threefold: to target the first-year PR student; to present PR inclusive of, and beyond, a management role; and, to draw together contributions from a range of Australian and (by the second edition) New Zealand academics and practitioners, including the various perspectives they would bring. Notably, in this first edition only three of the academic authors (as opposed to practitioner authors) held PhDs, but by the 2009 edition this number had grown to eight. Johnston noted in the third edition: "... the sophistication and scholarship of this third edition reflects advances and developments in the public relations industry and the academy during this decade" (2009 p. ix).

Shortly after the first edition of Johnston & Zawawi, *PRism*, an online, peer-refereed public relations and communication research journal was established in 2002, publishing its first issue in 2003. Originally published in Australia at Bond University, *PRism* moved to Massey University in New Zealand with its founding editor Elspeth Tilley in 2004/5, but retained an evenly split editorial committee of Australians and New Zealanders. Now in its ninth year, Tilley (2012) notes how the journal has been described by L'Etang as filling a particular niche in scholarly journal offerings by being interdisciplinary and non-paradigmatic in scope. In contrast with other journals in the field that are "closely associated with the dominant [normative theoretical] paradigm," *PRism* "makes a point to encourage diverse perspectives" (Tilley, 2012, personal communication).

After Bill Sherman's retirement, Candy Tymson partnered with pioneering Australian PR practitioner and founder of Professional Public Relations (PPR), Peter Lazar, and his son, Richard Lazar, to produce two more editions of their manual during the 2000s. Tymson, Lazar & Lazar (2002 and 2008) was broadened to become *The Australian and New Zealand Public Relations Manual* and increased its theoretical and research content which resulted in it becoming a textbook in some PR courses. However, with none of its authors being an academic or having a scholarly research profile, Johnston & Zawawi (2000) and two further editions of this book (Johnston & Zawawi, 2004, 2009) remained the only entry-level Australian PR textbook published by a mainstream publisher until the late 2000s.<sup>2</sup>

## **Growth in PR literature continues**

Meanwhile, others had moved to publishing in specialty fields of PR, reflective of the growing scholarship in the academy and the rise in PhD completions. The new millennium also saw the emergence of international collaborations with a distinct shift toward British, European and New Zealand scholarship, compared with the previous dominant North American focus. Christine Daymon and Immy Hollaway (2002) published a specialist PR research book, *Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations and Marketing Communications* (Routledge). While this book (published as a second edition in 2011) was originally a British collaboration, Daymon was Australian-based by the second edition. More recently she collaborated with Australian academic Kristin Demetriou, in gathering an international line-up for their *Gender and Public Relations* (Routledge, forthcoming in 2013). Chapter authors for this book are from the Philippines, England, Belgium, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Another Australian-British collaboration was the edited *Sport Public Relations and Communication* (Butterworth-Heinemann), edited by Maria

Hopwood (formerly of Bond University but at Leeds by the book's publication), Paul Kitchin (University of Ulster) and James Skinner (Griffith University).

Australia-New Zealand links continued to remain strong, with *PRism* sporting dual branding by an Australian (Bond) and New Zealand (Massey) university, and the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA) reinforcing links across the Tasman. In addition, Johnston and Zawawi's 2004 and 2009 editions included chapters by New Zealand authors and the specialist text *Public Relations Issues and Crisis Management*, edited by Monash academics Chris Galloway and Kwanema Kwansah Aidoo (2005), also included chapters from Australian and New Zealand authors.

As the first decade of the 2000s progressed, it was as if the Australian PR academic community came to realise the stark lack of localised books in both specialist and generalist fields. A relative rush of new books appeared including, in chronological order:

- Stanton, R. (2007). *Media relations*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press;
- Johnston, J. (2007). *Media relations: Issues and strategies*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin;
- Harrison, K. (2008). *Strategic public relations: A practical guide to success*. Perth: Century Consulting Group (previously published in three earlier editions);
- Mahoney, J. (2008). *Public relations writing in Australia*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press;
- Chia, J., & Synnott, G. (Eds.). (2009). *Introduction to public relations: From theory to practice*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press;
- Sheehan, M., & Xavier, R. (Eds.). (2009). *Public relations campaigns*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

As the titles suggest, some of these were specialised texts dealing with writing, media relations and case studies of PR campaigns. Johnston's media relations text, published in the same year as Stanton's, highlighted the need for this popular subject area to be addressed by a local text. Other books which had application for PR, but which were cross-disciplinary in approach – such as Steven Stockwell's (2005) *Political Campaign Strategy: Doing Democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* – showed how members of the academy were publishing to their strengths, often borne out of their PhD research.

By the late 2000s, Australian academics and students had access to at least three comprehensive textbooks on PR – Chia and Synnott (2009), Johnston and Zawawi (2009) and Harrison (2008). Nevertheless, as Macnamara (2010a) observed, PR scholarship in Australia even in the late 2000s continued to utilise a number of international texts. Prominent among these were the US texts *Cutlip and Center's Effective Public Relations* (Broom, 2009); *Public Relations Strategies and Tactics* (Wilcox & Cameron, 2006, 2010), the final Excellence Study book by L. Grunig, J. Grunig and Dozier (2002); and *The Future of Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (Toth, 2007), as well as the UK text, *Exploring Public Relations* (Tench & Yeoman, 2009).

The beginning of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw a new journal launched, *Public Communication Review*, published by the University of Technology Sydney where Macnamara is now Professor of Public Communication and co-editor. *PCR*, launched in 2010, is published in electronic form only and focuses on 'public communication' incorporating advertising, PR, corporate communication, organisational communication, political communication and social media and networking.. The editors, Macnamara and media historian, Robert Crawford, advocate transdisciplinary and integrated thinking in conceptualising and undertaking public communication.



In the same year, Macnamara also published *The 21st Century Media (R)evolution: Emergent Communication Practices* through Peter Lang, New York. While being a broad analysis reporting research into social media in the context of journalism and media studies, the public sphere and political communication, social capital and notions of community, Macnamara (2010b) included chapters examining public relations and advertising in the era of Web 2.0 and the emerging Web 3.0.

During this period Australian scholars increasingly turned to non-US and alternative theories of PR, including critical theories emerging in the UK, Europe, New Zealand and in some Asian and Africa studies. This was in contrast to the US-dominated approaches that had underpinned the introduction of PR into the academy just 50 years before. In a paper presented at the 2010 ANZCA conference, Macnamara (2010a) reported a content analysis of 14 PR books widely used in Australia in which he identified continuing “gaps” in terms of their axiological, epistemological and methodological focus. He expanded this analysis in the international journal *Public Relations Inquiry* in 2012, examining 20 of the most widely used PR books in Australia which showed significant broadening of scholarship, but a resilient “shadow of Excellence theory” and American functionalist concepts of PR (Macnamara, 2012a). Macnamara’s critique identified a need for an advanced text to better reflect the contemporary environment and critical and emergent approaches and spurred publication of a new ‘Australasian’ textbook on PR (Macnamara, 2012b). As suggested by the title, *Public Relations Theories, Practices, Critiques*, this text is presented in three parts discussing theories, practices (methods and activities) and critical analysis of public relations. While recognising and summarising the ‘body of knowledge’ accumulated within the dominant paradigm of Excellence theory, Macnamara’s latest book identifies more than 20 major theories and models of PR, including emerging models, and supports calls for a multi-paradigmatic approach. In reviewing the text, Anne Gregory (2012) commented: “This is the most comprehensive review of the theories pertinent to public relations that I have ever seen brought together”.

Existing texts also have increasingly presented expanded approaches to PR practice – both geographically and ideologically. For example, in subsequent editions, Johnston and Zawawi broadened the scope to include a dedicated chapter on the Third Sector, arguing that “developments such as the growth of anti-globalisation coalitions, which by their very nature are anti-organisational but which use these same tools against the corporations, make a new approach and a new definition necessary” (2004: 6). Chia and Synnott’s *Introduction to Public Relations: From Theory to Practice*, revised and expanded in its second edition (2012), included a chapter on Asian PR stakeholder management broadening the scope beyond the Anglo-American. .

Meanwhile, Harrison published a substantially expanded and updated fifth edition of his *Strategic Public Relations: A Practical Guide to Success* in 2011 with a major focus on online communication using Web sites, e-mail, blogs and social networks, now with mainstream publisher Palgrave Macmillan. Two books on strategic communication were added to the list in 2012: James Mahoney’s *Strategic Communication: Principles and Practice* (2012) and a multi-disciplinary text by Greenland, Bainbridge, Galloway and Gill (2012), *Strategic Communication: Cases in Marketing, Public Relations, Advertising and Media*. Johnston’s *Media Relations: Issues and Strategies* (2013) moved to its second edition, completely overhauled, with a focus on the interconnections between PR, the news media and social media. New chapters on law, campaigns and social media addressed both the feedback from the first edition and the increasingly complex communication environment.

The pace of publication shows signs of continuing to increase. A second edition of Sheehan and Xavier's *Public Relations Campaigns* will be published in 2013, as well as a second edition of *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Media (R)evolution: Emergent Communication Practices* (Macnamara, 2013). A fourth edition of Johnston & Zawawi's text will appear in 2014 with a significant change. With co-editor Clara Zawawi now living in the middle-east and working outside PR, Deakin University's Mark Sheehan will take on the role of co-editor with Johnston. Zawawi will remain involved in an 'honorary' capacity. Other new titles include Sheehan and Sekules' edited text, *The Influence Seekers: Lobbying in Australia* (2013), and Demetrious' *Speaking Up: Public Relations, Activism and Social Change* (2013).

## **Tertiary degrees, accreditation and postgraduate study**

These key developments in Australian PR literature mirror pivotal points in tertiary education over more than 50 years. The following brief discussion traces the parallel development of PR courses in Australian universities and colleges.

An archival study by Gleeson (forthcoming) notes the first tertiary lecture in publicity may have been given at Sydney University in the early 1950s, delivered by an economics professor. It is noteworthy that Sommerlad's text published in 1950, discussed earlier, was endorsed by the Vice-Chancellor at this university. Although it is not clear if this book was ever used as a university text or simply endorsed as one, it would appear that public relations was at least on the university 'radar' at this time. Gleeson's study has also found archival material to supplement the existing literature on the early development of PR education in Australia. While David Potts wrote the first PR textbook in Australia, and is often accredited as introducing the first PR course into the Australian tertiary curriculum in the late 1960s/early 1970s at Mitchell College of Advanced Education (MCAE) in Bathurst, Gleeson reports that several courses at colleges and institutes predated this. The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) introduced the first PR certificate course in Australia in 1964, after approaches to both Melbourne and Monash Universities by the PRIA (Victoria Branch) to do so were unsuccessful. Dwyer's 1961 edited handbook, discussed earlier, appears to have been the prescribed text (Gleeson, forthcoming). Gleeson has also identified early adoption of PR courses at the South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT) in 1967; short courses at the NSW Institute of Technology (which would become UTS) in 1965; and a part-time diploma at the NSW Institute of Business Studies (which was later to merge with the NSW Institute of Technology) in 1969. This research further expands the emerging history of PR scholarship in Australia and shows that Potts' introduction of PR studies at MCAE followed these earlier courses, some of which had changed or faltered along the way. Potts (as cited in Morath, 2008, p. 52) reported:

Toward the end of the 1960s, when I was complaining about the lack of trained recruits in the public relations industry, Mitchell College of Advanced Education in Bathurst asked me to design courses for them in public relations and journalism.

The first intake of students into the three-year diploma course occurred in 1971 (following enrolments the previous year). It went on to become an undergraduate degree in 1975 (Morath, 2008). Potts recalls that he travelled to Ohio University in the United States, spent six months there "learning about how the Americans approached the teaching of public relations and brought back some ideas to Australia and implemented them" (as cited in Morath, 2008, p. 53). At around the same time, Quarles (1993) notes that Queensland Institute of Technology (QIT - now QUT) was to introduce its degree program in 1974. It would appear then that QIT's degree programme may have predated that of MCAE (which was to become Charles Sturt University), which moved from diploma to degree in 1975.

Accreditation of PR courses by the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) was introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Marjorie Anderson, chairperson of the PRIA National Education Committee in 1999, reported that the PRIA first introduced accreditation procedures in 1985, but the introduction of industry accredited degrees gained momentum when David Potts and Jan Quarles from RMIT produced the Quarles Potts Report in 1989-1990 (Anderson 1999). Anderson further noted that “this research helped to identify the core subjects needed to prepare people for entry into a career in public relations” (1999, p. 123) and paved the way for the accreditation of PR courses in tertiary institutions in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia from 1991 (Anderson, 1999). By the second round of accreditation, five years later, eight universities had been accredited. In 1999, Anderson reported 16 universities were accredited or had initiated discussions about accreditation (1999).

In a review of PR education published in 2000, Anderson reflected on how PR education had improved after a decade of accreditation, saying:

... since the PRIA first introduced Accreditation Guidelines ten years ago, there has been a significant increase in the standard of public relations education. Today, students are supported by well-qualified educators, an ever growing body of knowledge and strong relationships between tertiary institutions and the industry. Cooperation between practitioners and educators ensures students are well prepared to meet the needs of an increasingly complex and challenging work environment (as cited in Singh & Smyth, 2000, p. 399).

More than a decade on, 45 undergraduate and postgraduate public relations courses at 17 Australian universities were accredited by the PRIA (PRIA, 2012).

A broader indication of the expansion of PR courses in Australia can be found in the Good Universities Guide (2012) which lists 189 undergraduate degree courses which provide a pathway to a career as a “Public relations officer”. While many of these include overlapping offerings within one school or faculty – for example, QUT offers a Bachelor of Business and a Bachelor of Business (accelerated) as two degrees – it nevertheless provides a sense of the breadth and growth of PR education. By way of comparison, there are 222 undergraduate degree courses in journalism listed on the same web site. The figures indicate how an industry which saw its first certificate offered in 1964 and diploma introduced several years later has gained recognition within the Australian academy in less than 50 years.

In 2005 Hatherell and Bartlett noted that “while the undergraduate curriculum will remain necessarily largely practice-based, more scholarly work is unlikely to emanate purely from the need to meet the technical demands of practice” and urged Australian PR educators to “move beyond undergraduate curriculums” (2005, p. 10). This, they argued, was required to construct a credible academic discipline. Along with Masters degree programs, PhD completions are seen as a mark of a mature academic discipline. This remains an under-researched aspect of PR scholarship in Australia and a pilot study is reported here to inform this analysis and future research directions. An informal survey was conducted among PR educators to identify PhD completions and near-completions via the Australian-based edu-pr listserv. The findings are summarised in Table 1, below.

The request for data on doctoral research was distributed in May 2012 seeking feedback on thesis topics, completion dates or proposed completion dates. The aim was to gain a sense of the higher degree landscape within the PR discipline. The request for information drew an enthusiastic response. Of the approximately 100 listserv members, 30 responses were received advising of 39 Australian PhD completions and candidatures due for completion in

2013. Some responses included details of other PhD candidates with unknown completion dates. In addition, the two authors added their own PhD completions. As shown in Table 1, inclusion of these indicates a total of 47 PhDs completed or underway in PR or PR-related fields.

The data also shows an acceleration of doctoral study, with no PhDs completed before 2000, 14 completed up to the beginning of 2010, and 25 completed or in progress by the beginning of 2013.

PR-related PhDs Completed and In Progress											
	Pre- 2000	2000-1	2002-3	2004-5	2006-7	2008-9	2010-11	2012	2013 -	Total	Unknown
Completions	0	2	2	4	6	1	7	1		22	[3]
In progress								5	12	17	[3]

Table 1. PR-related PhD completions and proposed completions in Australia by year

This reinforces Johnston’s 2009 observation of a significant jump in PhD completions among contributors to the Johnston and Zawawi textbook between 2000 and 2009. Another finding was that many of those who had completed between 2001 and 2010 were currently supervising those who were due to complete in the next two to three years. A more systematic study of PhDs and other research higher degrees would most certainly be worthwhile to gain a true picture of the higher degree environment in PR in Australia. The authors are aware of at least two PhDs currently underway which focus on the development of PR scholarship in Australia and this work is welcome.

## Moving forward

In his latest book, Macnamara (2012b) noted that PR literature in Australia still has a way to go to fully reflect emergent thinking in Europe, New Zealand and among critical scholars around the globe. Nevertheless, in just over a decade, Australia has moved from a paucity of PR literature published by Australian academics to a rapidly growing collection of publications, including five dedicated text books and a range of specialist texts, edited collections or monographs ranging in subject from research and lobbying to gender and activism. Given the relative youth of PR scholarship in Australia, the discipline can be seen to be moving at a significant rate in publishing and updating literature.

This analysis also reveals that Australian PR literature has broadened beyond the dominant American paradigm to incorporate European thinking and critical perspectives, as well as local understandings. There remains a lacuna at the heart of Australian PR, nevertheless, in that scholarship still minimally reflects Asian and Indigenous perspectives, other than as ‘target audiences’. What unique perspectives might be revealed from the deep appreciation of relationships in Asian cultures and from Aboriginal society that has lived in relative harmony for millennia are questions for future research. There is evidence that PhD enrolments and completions are increasing, reflecting a maturing of the discipline, and it is to be hoped that the increasing number of PhDs in the field will spur further expansion and broadening of scholarship to reflect the diverse society and cultures of Australia and the region.

In concluding, it is instructive to borrow a metaphor from Roslyn Petelin who in 2005 wrote a critique of the scholarship of public relations in Australia. As the editor of *The Australian Journal of Communication* (AJC), she had been reviewing Australian PR literature for many years. Petelin (2005) cited cultural theorists Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of a rhizomatic

organisation of knowledge as compared to the conventional, arboreal accounts of a tree or body of knowledge (a rhizome being an underground tuber that can sprout from anywhere in the system.) She summarised:

The metaphorical shift from tree to rhizome helps distinguish different approaches. In the arboreal approach, for example, the Public Relations Society of America's Body of Knowledge project, which arose out of the US experience, suggests an attempt at totalizing knowledge through a linear process that begins from establishing roots and carries through to the latest leaves. In the rhizomatic approach, significant new growth can come from anywhere in the system (p. 458).

Petelin's account, which traces Australian PR scholarship as well as the international debate within the *AJC* and more broadly within the Australian context, suggests ultimately that the rhizomatic can co-exist with the arboreal. Her account suggests that in embracing these potentials, PR scholars should "de-territorialize" existing knowledge blocs and "re-territorialize" these into the Australian space. By so doing, local knowledge can impact on the field as a whole. This is the challenge that arguably began in the 1950s and continued through the 1960s and 1970s but has gained momentum in the past decade. It will remain the challenge for Australian PR scholars and others who see the benefits of both the rhizomatic and the arboreal approach to localised and international knowledge creation.

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- <sup>1</sup> Though we have attempted to include a comprehensive range of literature as developed in Australia since the early days of publishing about public relations, it is inevitable that omissions may occur. The inclusion or omission of publications in this article in no way reflects their endorsement by the authors.
- <sup>2</sup> Kim Harrison's first edition of *Strategic Public Relations: A Practical Guide to Success* was first published by Perth's Vineyard Publishing in 2000, moving to several new editions with Century Consulting and most recently published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2011.