

Strategies of Public Relations
Professor Farbman
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Sherpa PR

On September 20, 2006 Sherpa Public Relations met with our client, Lambda Pi Eta. We asked Tom Hipper, president of LPE, a series of questions about their organization and talked about our plans for this upcoming project. Below is a transcription of our interview.

S = Sherpa

TH = Tom Hipper

S: How would you describe your organization, Lambda Pi Eta?

TH: I would say that it is a definite work in progress. I think that we have high hopes for this year, and we really need to kind of focus on the awareness aspect to get us where we want to be. It's a student run honor society; we do have a faculty supervisor, Dr. Pollock. Essentially the application process involves a credit limit: a 3.3 in the major, 3.0 overall. We are sending out applications, which should be going out soon, and we look them over. If you fit the requirements you're pretty much in. We meet throughout the year, we run certain events, and try to get as much student input as we can. Essentially it's all about letting kids learn more about the major, and hopefully this year we're gonna reach out to people who are not yet at that level. In the past we have excluded people who have not yet applied, it kind of applies to juniors, and when you come in you know nothing.

S: Do you guys have weekly meetings?

TH: Usually once a month we meet. Generally Monday nights, but again we're going to see how people feel about that once we have our first meeting.

S: What are your goals for this year?

TH: Are goals are mainly to reach out to alumni and incoming freshman students, or sophomores who are not yet eligible. We want to revive the Communication Club, it does

exist, but it is almost dead. We're going to bring that back and we want to establish a similar leadership E-board that LPE has, so that there's almost two levels. The goal here is that we want to set up a kind of on-deck circle without taking away from the prestige of the honor society. So we don't want it to have all the privileges that LPE has, but we want to have it so that you're kind of equipped to jump right in once it's your time. And you can come to most of the events.

S: So get the students equipped with the Communication Club so that then when they're ready for LPE they could jump right in?

TH: Exactly

S: I didn't even know about a Communication Club.

TH: It's probably the norm that you shouldn't know about that. It really only exists on paper, on file because it was in the past. I don't think there is anyone running it right now. But we're going to start that up, and we're actually going to encourage the Comm clubbers to come to the first LPE meeting, so everyone's invited. If you're a Comm major or open options you can come out. So that's the first step here, we want to definitely spread the awareness.

S: How are you thinking of publicizing the Comm club, or getting faculty involved?

TH: I think we need to determine first how much interest we have in it. I'm hoping that by getting the word out there will be some people who are interested in it. I think the idea of having them have their own E-board is something that actually came up the other night. We are planning on having one the E-board members of LPE taking leadership in that area, getting it off the ground, and once they feel comfortable they can co-sponsor an event with us and really get a feel for that too. As far as the main differences between the Comm Club and LPE, we haven't mapped those out in great detail yet; we don't know what the Comm Club doesn't have that LPE has. We kind of want to have an idea of how

many people are going to show up as a start. And then what we need to do to get more people, or if we have enough, is what we're going to do with them from there. But that's generally the idea, we're going to have someone focus on getting those guys started, and creating some leadership there and then letting them run their own show.

S: So your targets are Comm majors, but this year you want to focus also on alumni?

TH: Yeah, I think our main goal is dealing with the kids coming up, the kids who show up for Comm club, because alumni has been reached out in the past, but just not at the extent that we would want to. We do things like career night, where we have people come back who graduated as majors here and they talk about what careers they're in and how they got there and what they recommend. We have grad school night, same kind of thing, people who went there will come back and share their stories. When we presented a paper at NJCA at Montclair, we attended a national LPE meeting. All the groups there unanimously around the country when they have their induction ceremonies will invite alumni back. We only have students and parents there now so we want to change that as well. Just helping establish and strengthen alumni relations that we have, or want to have, will really help this club, with integrity, and really give the students the resources that they need, whether it will be for internships or grad school or careers. You guys know, as Comm majors, that it could be a lost feeling sometimes. It's a reason why a lot of people are in this major; they want something broad so that they can keep their options open. It's comforting, but at the same time it can be a little scary. We're going to do whatever we can, for our sake and for everyone else's. Help you guys make those decisions.

S: You also mentioned that you want to reach out to open options majors as well?

TH: It's not that we're in dire need of recruiting new majors, it's just that if there's someone out there who has no idea about this major and is kind of afraid who doesn't know what it means, or has parents who are like "What the hell is a Comm major?" I just want to have it so that they can understand how good this department can be and what you can get out of it. It's not like we want to recruit open options, but by all means if

people are on the fence who don't have a clue we invite them to come take a look at what we have to offer.

S: What messages are you giving out, about your activities and events? What do you want people to get?

TH: That's a tough one.

S: I know that you sent out an email through Dr. Ryan.

TH: Yes. That's certainly one aspect we focus on. It's not necessarily a message, but we would like to get word out that we are having these events and that they can be helpful. Whether it be Comm Studies night that help with individual classes, or grad school night or career night. I guess the overall message too is to showcase what this entire department has to offer. We have some tremendous faculty, a lot of resources and connections, and we've won national awards for our papers. Students who go to incredible grad schools, some of which are Ivy League. We want to bring a little prestige back into the major, and I know the label of, "oh, you're a Comm major." Some of us work harder than others who have "better majors" in people's eyes. I'm hoping this whole process will help strengthen the Comm department as a whole, and that will seep out to the rest of the campus too. Certainly in addition, making people more aware of our events, having people see what we're about and be interested

S: Back to promoting, or publicizing these events, do you have any kind of a budget that you have, or is it basically what the students give you?

TH: We do have a budget actually, we've raised money in the past through fundraisers, at Chevy's, and actually Coldstone is holding out on what they owe us so we gotta go down there face-to-face. We have some money set aside, and I know basically to start we really want to focus on emails, mass emails and kind of repetition, making sure our info keeps getting out...and a lot of it is word of mouth. Every class that I walk by and I don't have

class I jump in and say something, as you guys all know. We use different kinds of methods to get the message out there, we haven't planned anything extravagant as far as spreading the word other than those few things because we don't know what will really work. As of right now, all we have the money set aside for is providing food for the events that we put on, and that's a big thing. And that's another thing we plan on doing, at least as a start to encourage attendance, we're gonna try to make it worth people's while.

S: Do you receive money from the school, or is it totally fundraised?

TH: Nope, as an honor society we are not affiliated with SFB, so we raise our own funds. We're not technically a club; we're an honor society. Now the Comm club could potentially look into that, if they want to, so that is something to keep in mind as well. Again this is just preliminary stuff, but they could technically get on SFB's radar and try to get funding.

S: What different venues have you tried to acquire money, besides fundraisers like Chevy's or Coldstone?

TH: To be honest with you, I think that's it...we have our dues that people pay when they come in, but that goes towards the honor cords and stuff like that. To be honest with you funding we're doing alright. I shouldn't be on tape saying this, because TCNJ will come track us down, because every other club seems to be hurting with funding, but we're pretty squared away, it's really all a matter of finding things to do that are reasonable enough to spend the funding on. So we're not too concerned...what we've done in the past has been very helpful, and now that we may start using the money for more extravagant food and stuff like that. We might need to look for new ways, but we are certainly open to that. So far so good.

S: So the thing here is not really the money, because we have it, but what activities to prepare to use that money and then how to attract and publicize so that people come to these events?

TH: Exactly. That's pretty much all we need the money for right now. Maybe we did discuss perhaps some sort of team building trip somewhere, some fun day out where we can kind of encourage a lot of people to come and really get to meet everybody. So that might be something we need to explore. And again, I expect to have the funding for that as well, but yeah, primarily we are certainly we are interested in finding out what's the best way to use the money we have.

S: Where do you see LPE standing five years from now?

TH: Well, let me just tell that I think in five years, I would say my goal is to be very similar to where we stand at the end of this year. We're gonna really shoot for the stars this year and really try to revolutionize this program, which is why we are really happy to have you guys. This is not merely keeping things the same way and trying to get attention, we're gonna really try to revamp this program. And again, we're just throwing out some preliminary ideas that will kind of work itself out, and you guys will help us do that as well, but just little things that we talked about, like creating ideal schedules for everyone, and really making these events great things with great resources and stuff like that. We want to really revamp the program by the end of this year, and then create a better election process for those who will follow us in next year. I think we put it upon ourselves to make the changes, and it's going to be up to everyone else to keep it that way. In the past the elections have been, "come on, somebody, does anyone want to run?" I mean it's hit or miss, some people run who really care about the organization, and others run that kind of just go through the motions, and people show up to get their two points, that's it, no involvement, nothing. That's the way we kinda stand right now, and so we're gonna really try to revamp these programs, and if nothing else, start everything that we want to get accomplished and then hopefully everyone else can keep that going and refine it and perfect it. In five years, I'll keep you guys up to date about the new ideas

we have and certainly bounce some off us too, but in five years I just hope that it's pretty much everything that we wanted to accomplish by the end of this year and then refine it. Certainly I'll have more details soon about what we want to do.

S: So you want to drum up interest internally, as well as externally, with people that are members already in it who seem lackadaisical about the club?

TH: Yeah. And I think that's fair, because it's very hard to show up to a meeting where it's implied, "oh yeah you came here and got your two points, goodnight" I think it starts from the top, we want to make it fun but we also want to make it effective, where it seems like worth coming to, not just something you can put on your résumé. So we're gonna encourage a little more involvement, and I think by that's just doing that people will just naturally get involved, when all you have to do is show up and we got enough to do as it is.

S: Is there a requirement for members to show up to get points?

TH: Well it's not if you miss one meeting you're out, what we normally do is that it's usually two points per meeting, you come to that meeting you get two points. You go to events, you help out at events you get your two points. I know sometimes we sponsor guest speakers and stuff like that, we had a gentleman through Dr. Pollock come from 60 Minutes, last year, to give a speech on AIDS and show his clip that made it onto CBS. I think I ushered that to get my two points, stuff like that. So that's basically the extent that we encourage involvement, and maybe we need to redefine those a little bit. Again I don't want to set up these parameters so that all it is is that it's tougher to get the two points, and we're dragging people. We want to see that these things can be worthwhile, and I think they need to be tinkered with a little bit. Again with the alumni, we just did a poor job contacting people last year, we gave people such short notice, someone couldn't make it, and it wasn't as good as it should have been. So it was a little helpful, but not really what we were looking for.

S: You said that you are shooting for the stars, that you want to take it to a whole different level, to a whole different notch. During the past 10 years, has it always been like that, or has it slowly been getting better or getting worse in terms of publicity and interest?

TH: That would be a very good question to ask Dr. Pollock, and I can look into that for you. My guess just from my experience, since I have been here and what I have heard is that it's been pretty stagnant, it's kind of just been passed on...you get this folder and see the events we did and decide on whether or not to throw it, whoever shows up shows up, boom, that's it. Done, next one, that's the way it's always been. Well, it's not fair to say that about everyone, we've had some highly capable leadership, even last year, I don't know if you know her, Kendall Anderson, she did a fantastic job with the programming. I can't tell you how amazed Dr. Ryan and everyone in there were that sent out that email, that we already drafted something ahead of time, and sent it out. That's what we're talking about here, it's usually the day before you find out about something and you can't make it. It's been pretty stagnant, and it's such a shame too because this is how we know that we have the capability to be on top. Seven out of the past 12 years we've had national representation on the E-board, right now we have a current president and VP of national Lambda Pi Eta. A couple of us are hoping to represent this year too, so we have national prominence, and that really speaks to...what does that say about this program? We don't have a power house LPE program, but this department is so respected in the communication field that we're electing national members. It's pretty amazing, and we go to conferences and clean house with awards. I mean people know us, as Dr. Pollock will tell you, and so I kinda want to live up to that, and that definitely means, regardless of how it's been in the past, just stepping it up a little bit this year.

S: How many people are on your executive board and how many members do you have?

TH: I have five E-board members, including myself. We have four VPs, who handle everything from funding, to programming...there's actually a VP of PR, she's pretty much involved in the promotional aspect of things, which is where we could really use

your help. We just kind of get together and bounce ideas off each other. We defined our roles to the extent that we know what everyone does, but as far as LPE goes, it's tough to tell, because we have applications coming out within the next week I believe, so we'll know by mid-October the exact number of people. Just to ballpark it for you, last year I would say probably about 50 inductees and 50-70 people that were there already. Maybe I'm overshooting it a little bit, I gotta look into that for you. But again, that's pretty good numbers, and again, that's why I think upping the attendance and getting the word out about these events is possible, because the people are out there.

S: We noticed something, as we were researching, about your website. It's a little outdated, and I know that for finding out information the website is the easiest thing or even to get contact information. Are you planning on creating a new position just to focus on that?

TH: I am so glad you said that, I brought that up at the end of Monday's meeting, I was actually going to propose electing someone from LPE who was qualified to help out with the website. I dunno if any of you are capable of doing that, or know anyone who is, but any help we can get is good because whether it be contact information or dates, we can also have applications online, we can post deadlines for conferences, it could be a great resource, right now we just don't have the personnel for it. That is something we are going to explore. Our website's gotta go, it's just awful.

S: So it's no one's responsibility to handle it?

TH: Technically, it's someone's responsibility, she's capable of updating information, but not really doing anything with the site, and that's a goal of ours. And again, I don't want to publicize the website if it's not up to date, so that's step one, we need to revamp the website before we people use it.

S: On the advertising aspect of it, what's your relationship with the media? Do you use the Signal and the radio station?

TH: Not as much as we should really.

S: Have you used it in the past?

TH: Not that I'm aware of. We are looking to reach out...we are talking with the president of the English secondary ed honor society, we're looking into working with her with some community service aspect to kind of get out name out in the community, and restore community relations, stuff like that, as well as working with other groups, because co-sponsorship is big. Because think about it, career night and grad school night are just two examples. There's no reason for other liberal arts majors not to come to those. Poli sci, psychology...you know there's people who know what grad school was like and go through the motions and what to expect, whether you should go right into grad school after undergrad or wait to get a job first, these are things that everybody should know. So co-sponsorship with other clubs, and certainly with the Signal and the radio station would be good. WTSR, funny enough, was who we sponsored for this PR project. We've found that there's potential to reach a large number of students. That could be a good avenue to explore, and being that the radio station is mostly run by Comm majors that would be a seemingly good route to go.

S: Same thing with the Journal the TV station...?

TH : I have no experience with the Journal. Of the three, I don't know that much about it, I think out of the three that would seem to me the least effective way to get the word out, just because it's the least...

S: The Signal is probably the most widely used...

TH: Probably, and again that's where funding could come into play too. Usually you tend to barter with other clubs instead of just giving money. "You help us we help you" sort of thing. I would like to explore something with the Signal, that would be a good idea.

S: So you mostly convey messages through email or through word of mouth?

TH: As of right now those are our two biggest things, yeah. The PR girl, Lindsey Borda, she's generally in charge of pamphlets, stuff like that and we're kind of gonna do a test run of that, see how effective that can be, put stuff up in Kendall mainly, maybe Eickhoff. That's another option as well, but not one that's really been utilized in the past, but I'm not really sure what the effectiveness of that would be, maybe that's something that you can include in your survey.

S: I'm thinking that the area that needs the most development in your organization is basically publicity, because people are not aware that LPE exists, or the Comm club exists, or they're not aware of the events that you are sending out through email, so would you say, that besides the internal issues with the executive board, that that's your main problem?

TH: Yeah, publicity and maybe planning as well. Because all these ideas sound great, but someone's gotta do the nitty gritty work of developing that ideal schedule, stuff like that. And so we could certainly use some feedback from that, and we plan on getting that from the meetings as well, but obviously ongoing feedback from you guys would be helpful too. In addition to it, publicity, making sure that these events go smoothly would be nice too, because if we get the attendance, we want them to run correctly too.

S: Would you say that the awards that you've won would be the most type of thing that people are not aware of? Are you saying that type of recognition?

TH: The national positions we hold, the awards we've won, we have the top undergraduate paper of the year, a peer of mine won, that's what she's going to San Antonio for. I mean that's paper of the year. Wow. That's big stuff. I think recognition comes from two places, one being from the awards we've won and stuff that's nice, but two I really think that networking and getting involved with other organizations and

showing them what we have is another good way of doing that, that seems to be a really good thing too. So connecting with other people and developing contacts with other honor societies and clubs would be another good thing too.

S: Your main audience would be your over 100 members, and your alumni. Have you in the past, or plan on, getting feedback from them to see what exactly they want out of being a member, and to see whether goals have been met?

TH: Nothing formal like that, I don't want to say no across the board, I mean there's been a lot of discussion about it, the E-board has a lot of flexibility to kind of implement what they want, and I think having to have to be a member before being on the exec board that really gives you a chance to implement the changes you want. So it's not that there's no feedback but there has not been an attempt to formally reach out to all the Comm majors. I don't want you to think that we're just dealing with an audience of 100 people; we want to reach everybody from LPE, to pretty much everyone in the Comm department, freshman to senior, and then alumni. It is a rather fairly large audience to deal with, and we don't want to focus on us and seclude, that's been the problem in the past, we kinda want to spread the word to everyone. That kind of feedback would certainly be helpful too, because that would not only help us now, but that would give us good ideas for the future.

S: Would you be interested in surveying an Intro to Comm course, to see about the Communication Studies club, what they would be looking for? Would that be the type of feedback you would want us to help with that?

TH: Yup. I maybe wouldn't limit it to just an Intro to Comm class, if there is a way to reach more freshman maybe. If we can get feedback, and prove to them that we've heard it, and start to implement those things then that would really get people involved I think.

S: Have there been things that people have wanted that you've not provided?

TH: If I do, nothing's coming to me. That's obviously a problem, this is not a perfect organization, nothing is. So the fact that I don't have a general idea what the student body wants to change is an issue.

S: I know that you have the Comm Studies night where you have students ask questions. But do you also have tutoring sessions for students that are having trouble with Comm classes?

TH: That really is what Comm Studies night is about. It's a chance for any class, any student to come and to get advice on a big project or find out what there is to expect. The event is September 27th, so that's coming up, and we not only need people who want to learn but who have been through it and could teach that as well. But no, we don't have anything throughout the year that would help, but that would be another good thing to implement.

S: Is there anything additional that you would like to say? What's your main objective, what do you hope we will provide for you?

TH: I hope for two things, and they're kind of intertwined really. That you could really help us reach out to all of the Comm students here, and make them aware of this club. And two, have some sort of connection with us and them where we can get some feedback from them, whether they are content with what we have, if they liked the event we just had, or what we have lacking, what we could work on. And then anything you could do with the website design would be great too because I think that would really help both sides in terms of spreading the word. And I guess another objective would be developing contacts with other student organizations or honor societies.

S: So your big things here are co-sponsorship, revive the Comm club so that they can start getting used to it and jump right into LPE, have better publicity, starting with the website, because that's the easiest way to get any type of information, and just in general

just giving Comm majors a better understanding of Comm studies and the resources available to them?

TH: Yeah, and just giving them the ability to chime in what they like and don't like. And all I can say is if you need something else, you need more info, I can get it for you. And actually what I'd like to have you guys do is come one to our next meetings. Do you know if Monday nights work for you like 9-9:30?

S: 9's good.

TH: Yeah because if we meet next week, that would probably be our final meeting before an actual LPE meeting. That would be good for you to attend one of those so you can actually see how we do things. I'll be in touch and let you know. That's what we have tentatively planned, it would give you the chance to pick the brains of everyone else in case I missed out something, and that way maybe by then you have some ideas or have some suggestions for us, things that you could help us explore. You could think it over the next couple of days and then be in touch with all of us, but at least you could get to meet everybody, and I mean if you don't have enough ammunition right now we can supply that in the future, I promise.

S: Thank you very much.

TH: Thank you, this is great. We could really use this.