In 2010, we undertook a significant refocusing of our national advocacy efforts to address the issues that are of the greatest interest to you — our members and the larger profession — and to ensure we retain our position as an effective advocate and thought leader.

PRSA established three core areas of focus, which are based on research you might have taken part in over the past year: the role and value of public relations, ethics and diversity in the profession. We began with the establishment of an Advocacy Advisory Board (AAB) to facilitate streamlined proactive and reactive responses and commentary on pressing industry and business issues.

Throughout the year, PRSA offered its perspective in published position statements, op-ed pieces and letters to the editor on issues ranging from the unethical communications practices of political front groups (Financial Times), to upholding the value of strategic public relations (The New York Times Magazine), to the need for ethical practices in paid blogging platforms (Advertising Age), among several other examples.

PRSA finished the year by submitting formal comments to the Federal Trade Commission on proposed amendments to its Green Guides for environmental marketing, and separately reached out to PRSA members and public relations practitioners to provide accurate information and practical guidance about the Guides.
Following the October 2009 launch of the PRSA Business Case for Public Relations™, we successfully extended the reach and influence of our efforts to promote the role and value of your services, expertise and counsel as a public relations professional within the profession and in the business community.

PRSA was honored with a wonderful opportunity to raise awareness of “The Business Case” and the value and role of public relations, when our leaders rang the opening bell for the NASDAQ stock market exchange last April 28 in New York City.

Also in 2010, Public Relations Tactics, PRSA’s award-winning monthly newspaper, launched a new feature titled, “On the Case With.” Each month, PRSA asks an industry leader to reflect on his or her career and make a “business case” for public relations. Among the leading communicators featured: Mona Williams, vice president of corporate communications, Walmart Stores Inc., and MaryLee Sachs, chairman, Hill & Knowlton USA.

We also entered into two extensive professional development partnerships in 2010 that will help to further the pursuit of Business Case goals, especially in the area of measurement and evaluation of public relations services. These relationships will enable PRSA to better serve you in your professional efforts to establish the value and importance of your work.

In the fall, PRSA entered into a strategic partnership with the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) in an effort to help accelerate the development of standardized approaches to public relations program measurement. This partnership was built from PRSA’s role in developing the Barcelona Principles, which were released in July, and established universal standards in public relations measurement.

The first initiative of the PRSA-AMEC partnership was held in mid-November in London when we co-hosted an international measurement conference titled, “PR Measurement Metrics — From Concept to Implementation Reality.”

Over time, PRSA will continue to increase the number and level of Business Case resources, programming and initiatives, to complement our national advocacy efforts focusing on the value of public relations.

Chapter leaders from across the country came together during PRSA’s annual Leadership Rally in New York City last June 4.

PRSA’s 112 Chapters continue to be active in the areas of professional development, networking and professional recognition. We continue to support these efforts through a Chapter partnership network that pairs struggling Chapters with stronger ones that can offer advice and support, and provide training and orientation to more than 100 incoming leaders at our annual Leadership Rally in June. This year’s rally included a variety of internationally known speakers, such as Deirdre Breakenridge and David Grossman, APR, Fellow PRSA, in addition to discussions about Chapter/Section/District leadership.

Membership

As of Dec. 31, PRSA membership had increased by 1.5 percent over 2009. While the gain appears modest at first glance, it contrasts with 58 percent of associations that are predicting a decline in overall membership for 2010, according to a membership marketing study conducted by Marketing General Inc. PRSA staff and volunteers worked hard to increase overall recruitment and retention efforts through, among other things, a new online renewal and reinstatement process, new-member welcome packet and the first-ever member orientation webinar. We also continued to enhance our member benefits, providing additional industry-based resources and relocation services.

Meanwhile, Professional Interest Section membership grew by 3.4 percent (as of Dec. 31), including strong increases in Corporate, Association and Public Affairs/Government.

In January, PRSA relaunched its daily news digest, “Issues & Trends,” as part of an overall effort to reduce the volume of e-mail our members receive, and communicate with our members more effectively.

Information pertaining to PRSA and industry news, notices and offers — previously communicated in separate e-mails — is now consolidated into one streamlined channel. The new “Issues & Trends” still delivers the day’s top articles of interest to public relations professionals, but now incorporates job listings and career resources, Professional Development opportunities, and member, Section and Society news and highlights.
In 2009, we combined our Diversity Committee and Multicultural Communications Professional Section. Under the auspices of our new Diversity Committee, our efforts to create a more diverse Society and profession have gained momentum.

The extraordinarily passionate and hard-working members of this committee have come together and refocused our efforts on four main program areas where we can have the greatest impact: students, programming, Chapter relations and social media.

In the student area, for example, PRSA produced a video on “Diversity in Public Relations,” aimed at educating high school and college students about careers in public relations, in conjunction with City College of New York, where former board member Lynn Appelbaum, APR, Fellow PRSA, is on the faculty.

In the programming area, we’ve hosted idea swaps and free webinars, including “Diversity: A Matter of Gender or Style,” which we plan on continuing in 2011. Our Chapter Relations initiative is augmenting the work of our Chapter Diversity chairs by availing them of National programming opportunities and resources, such as our Diversity Tool Kit, and by acknowledging Chapters’ best practices through our Chapter Diversity Awards.

We also partnered with the Hispanic Public Relations Association (HPRA) and “Hispanic PR Blog” to sponsor the 2010 Hispanic PR & Social Marketing Conference.

We’re active in the social media realm, with the relaunch of our “Diversity Today” blog; an updated diversity section on our website, including links to helpful resources; and the creation of an @PRSADiversity Twitter account.

During the PRSA 2010 International Conference in Washington, D.C., you may have experienced one of Conference’s most enjoyable events — the PRSA Diversity Mixer. The mixer was co-sponsored by a number of leading organizations including: Asian American Journalists Association D.C. Chapter; Black Public Relations Society of Washington, D.C.; Capital Press Club; National Black Public Relations Society; National Association of Black Journalists; National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association, D.C. Chapter; and PRSA’s National Capital Chapter.

PRSA members Katerina Tsutsura (left) and Rochelle Ford, Ph.D., APR, enjoy the Diversity Mixer at the PRSA 2010 International Conference in Washington, D.C.
PRSA continues to advance public relations education and highlight distinguished programs.

Among the highlights was a record-breaking year for the Certification for Education in Public Relations (CEPR) program, which verifies the quality of undergraduate and graduate public relations programs based on recommendations from the Commission on Public Relations Education. The CEPR program is vital to ensure that your future colleagues receive the highest quality of public relations education.

Under the leadership of the Educational Affairs Committee, PRSA dispatched 16 reviewers, almost double the number sent in previous years, to six U.S. and two international schools, all of which earned certification. Dublin Institute of Technology, Ferris State University, Monmouth University, Rowan University, Syracuse University, University of Oklahoma, University of Maryland, and Universidad de Medellin.

At the PRSA 2010 International Conference, the Educational Affairs Committee also hosted information sessions for professionals interested in learning to teach, and for prospective CEPR reviewers and universities interested in certification. PRSA is supporting the education of you and your professional colleagues in other ways, as well. For example, two PRSA members are currently serving on the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) board of directors. In addition, the PRSA MBA/Business School Initiative Committee is building alliances with other public relations organizations and is developing an opinion piece for The Financial Times about the need for strategic communications content in MBA programs.

Finally, the PRSA Affiliate Task Force concluded its work in December 2010 by issuing its recommendations for the continuation of the Affiliate program, which provides PRSSA benefits to students whose schools do not qualify for PRSSA Chapters. PRSA sincerely appreciates the numerous educators, professionals and volunteers who continue to help us make advancements in public relations education and to advance the future generation of professionals.

Accreditation

From our member surveys, along with discussions with you and others in the profession, it has become clear that the Accredited in Public Relations (APR) credential remains valuable to those practitioners who earn it; to the agencies, clients and organizations they represent; and, perhaps most important, to the profession itself.

To help applicants prepare for the Examination for Accreditation in Public Relations, PRSA worked closely with the Houston, New Jersey and National Capital Chapters on the development and hosting of APR Boot Camps. These camps featured three-day preparation programs that culminated with an opportunity to sit for the Examination. Three sold-out APR Boot Camps were held in April, August and October, with similar programs planned for 2011.

In May, PRSA introduced the APR+M credential for military public affairs and communication personnel and their civilian counterparts working for the Department of Defense and military contractors. The APR+M is an enhanced certification that signifies an individual has met the base APR qualifications, as well as a rigorous course of study surrounding military public affairs in joint operations.

PRSSA

The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) continued to offer members and young professionals an array of beneficial resources, information and learning opportunities. Late in 2010, PRSSA unveiled its redesigned website as part of an overall revamp of all PRSA-branded websites.

The redesigned website provides greater access to the benefits and resources PRSSA members receive through PRSA and incorporates dozens of new features to improve usability. For example, the website now includes navigation menus to help students, faculty and professionals find tools and information more easily and efficiently, a section dedicated to Chapter leaders and advisers, a variety of connections to PRSSA social media channels, and streamlined access to news.

On a sad note, PRSSA lost one of its most determined advocates in 2010 with the passing of Betsy Plank, APR, Fellow PRSA, on May 23, following a short illness. Plank, 86, was one of the public relations profession’s most dynamic women and the most decorated PRSA member ever. Her lifetime of service to PRSA, and especially to PRSSA, will never be forgotten.

Special Events

International Conference

Despite ongoing concerns about the country’s economy, the PRSA 2010 International Conference, held Oct. 16–19 in Washington, D.C., attracted nearly 3,000 professional and student members. Attendance exceeded registration numbers from the past three years, reflecting not only a serious commitment to professional development and networking opportunities, but also to the value of the Conference as the must-attend industry event for sponsors, exhibitors and attendees alike.

Under the auspices of our new Diversity Committee, our effort to create a more diverse Society and profession have gained momentum.
Sponsor participation also reached an all-time high, with NASDAQ-OMX serving as the Premier Sponsor, and VMS and News Generation taking part as Gold Sponsors. The number of Conference exhibitors also increased dramatically, resulting in a sold-out exhibit floor that included, for the first time, five companies from overseas.

Verizon developed a PRSA-branded smart phone application for Conference attendees, which provided detailed descriptions of events and breakout sessions, as well as an exhibitor directory, news alerts, hotel information and local services and attractions.

Silver Anvil

In June, the stars of public relations came out to celebrate the profession’s finest work at PRSA’s 2010 Silver Anvil Awards. PRSA awarded the Best of Silver Anvil to the U.S. Air Force for “A Solemn View: Public Affairs Provides a Window to American Service Members’ Ultimate Sacrifice,” a program that facilitates media coverage of U.S. service personnel remains arriving at Dover Air Force Base. More than 20 members of the Air Force were on hand to accept the award, including the Honorable Erin C. Conaton, undersecretary of the Air Force.
Ethics

PRSA’s member Code of Ethics, which is widely regarded as the public relations profession’s de facto guide to ethical conduct, celebrated a decade of service in September with several events designed to draw attention to its core values, principles and practice guidelines.

To mark the occasion, members of PRSA’s Board of Ethics and Professional Standards (BEPS) conducted a roundtable discussion to address whether public relations leaders serve as the conscience of an organization. Tactics published the debate in the September issue.

In addition, PRSA held weekly “Tweet Chats” throughout September that focused on ethics and gathered thought leaders to discuss ethics-related issues on PRSAY. The “Tweet Chat” series culminated with a live session at the PRSA 2010 International Conference during a panel discussion on the state of ethics in the profession.

PRSA also sent a series of Ethics Moments to local Chapters to assist them in engaging members, their local media and business communities in relevant, issues-oriented scenarios regarding the importance of ethical behavior in communications.

Meanwhile, BEPS updated several provisions with the publication of three Professional Standards Advisories (PSAs). BEPS members developed revised positions on behalf of PRSA on issues concerning the expropriation of others’ intellectual property in business pitches, “looking the other way” during ethical dilemmas and the detrimental effects plagiarism has on business communications.

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Excellence in Society Management

Finances

This past June, leading economists declared that the recession was over and that the “new normal” will be a prolonged period of high unemployment with a slow economic growth rate. By implementing cost-cutting measures and tightly controlling spending — policies that we have followed since 2007 — PRSA was able to emerge from this challenging period in solid financial condition.

Membership dues that have remained flat since 2002, while member benefits have increased by 35 percent over the same time period, did present certain operational challenges. Even so, we have managed to remain fiscally healthy by delivering benefits more efficiently and by trimming costs.

Between 2008 and 2011, PRSA will have cut $1.5 million from its expense budget, while at the same time introducing more than 20 new benefits.

PRSA is on course to meet its net financial goals for the year. Our complete 2010 audit report and related financial statements will be posted on our website in the spring of 2011 as soon as the audit report is submitted, reviewed by the Finance Committee and accepted by the PRSA board.

Sponsors and Jobcenter

Corporate partnerships with leading companies, institutions and vendors in the public relations community are helping to enhance the value of PRSA membership. Last year, New York University became PRSA’s first University Partner, with the goal of providing career mentoring to our new professionals, as well as those who are seeking advice on how they can enhance and expand their careers.

Meanwhile, The PRSA Jobcenter continues to be one of the most robust job boards in the public relations profession. The Jobcenter ranks first in a Google search of “public relations jobs” and receives 19,000 visitors on a weekly basis.

2011-13 Strategic Plan

While we took time in 2010 reflecting on how we served you and helped you advance as professionals over the past year, we also spent a good portion of the year planning for the future success and growth of PRSA. That culminated with the development of the PRSA 2011-13 Strategic Plan, led by Rosanna M. Fiske, APR, 2011 PRSA chair and CEO.
The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is the nation’s largest community of public relations and communications professionals. We provide training, set standards of excellence and uphold principles of ethics for the global public relations profession. As a leading voice in the industry, we also advocate for greater understanding and adoption of public relations services.

PRSA’s 21,000 professional members represent nearly every practice area and professional and academic setting in public relations.

Headquartered in New York City, and chartered in 1947, PRSA is comprised of 112 local Chapters organized into 10 geographic Districts; 14 Professional Interest Sections focus on issues, trends and research relevant to specialized practice areas, such as technology, health care, financial communications, entertainment and sports, and travel tourism.