

# On the Road to Accreditation

By Martin Waxman, APR



Let me start at the end of my journey. No, not the day I received an email informing me that (big sigh of relief) I earned my accredited public relations (APR) designation. I'm talking about the most recent national CPRS conference in Niagara Falls during awards night. I was anxious, excited and a bit on edge. When my name was called and I collected my APR pin and certificate, I felt a touch of pride. It was hard to believe nearly 18 months had passed.

## **November 2004: The Decision**

I decided to obtain my APR designation soon after starting my own agency. I was determined to become a more active player in the public relations community and felt that earning the APR designation was a key step to being more professionally involved. Yet, it still took a full year for me to apply as the process looked a bit daunting at first. A year later, I read through the materials again and decided to make the leap. I thought: I'm a senior practitioner, I work in public relations every day, this couldn't be that hard. (It was.)

## **Early 2005: The Paper Chase**

CPRS notified me that I was eligible for the program. I contacted the accreditation chair who told me about an upcoming meeting. For me, attending the gathering was the turning point in the process. Not only did I meet my fellow travelers, but we decided to form a study group; a public relations version of The Paper Chase. At one of these meetings, a special guest who had recently earned her APR showed us her two-inch thick binder filled with notes, information and practice exams. At the sight of it, I felt a shiver of self-doubt.

## **April 2005: A Case Study**

The first hurdle was the case study. Former APRs had graciously come to share their experiences, and emphasized the importance of adhering to accreditation guidelines (i.e. count words), and writing the plan using the RACE formula, which requires a budget and a measurement component. While I had to put a lot of work into this, it was certainly, for me, one of the easier parts of the process. Then, the wait.

## **Summer/Fall 2005: Grunig and PT Barnum**

Our entire group passed the case study phase which meant we could now begin preparing for the final exams. Early in the summer we met and divided up the subject areas to be covered: communications theory; ethics; crisis communications; press agency; asymmetrical and symmetrical models of communication; and, Grunig, Bernays and PT Barnum. We practised by taking test exams and built our binders. I started quoting Grunig to colleagues. That fall I didn't read any books for pleasure. I read textbooks and research papers. I was a student all over again.

## **October 2005: Exam Day – Written and Oral**

We arrived at Humber College armed with our humongous binders and the best of intentions. The exam started and I wrote and wrote and wrote some more. Three plus hours pass faster than you'd imagine. And then all that was left was the oral test.

I prepared some key points I wanted to cover, but knew the most important thing was to be honest and myself. I was a bit shaky sitting there facing three of my peers (who had all earned their APRs). When asked how I might counsel a mayor on a certain issue, I said, 'First of all, I do product public relations, so I would probably refer him to a colleague who specializes in public affairs. That said, there are some general principles that Mayor Miller may wish to consider...' I left the interview feeling exhilarated and exhausted. And, while I was pretty sure I had made it, there was still a small doubt in my mind.

## **December 2005: APR**

The email arrived with the great news and I was elated and immediately changed my email signature to include APR. Would I recommend the process? Absolutely. I personally think professional designation is important for our profession. It is a year-long commitment that requires a great deal of work, energy and passion. I couldn't have done it without the gracious and supportive members of my study group: Daniel, Lawrence, Krys, Suzen and Danielle. Thanks so much to all of you.

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The APR program is open to CPRS members who have demonstrated high standards and accomplishments in the practice of public relations for more than five years. The purpose of the accreditation process is to measure a member's experience and competence in the professional practice of public relations and to recognize this achievement. Successful candidates earn the APR designation. For more information about the CPRS APR program, contact APR chair George Patterson, APR, at [George\\_Patterson@can.salvationarmy.org](mailto:George_Patterson@can.salvationarmy.org) or visit <http://www.cprstoronto.com/accreditation/index.aspx>.