

Biography: Robert J. O'Gara (2013)

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Bob serves as full and tenured professor, teaching the advertising, marketing communication and public relations courses in the Point Park University School of Communication, Pittsburgh. Bob has taught at Point Park University as an adjunct since 1982 and full-time since 1992.

Education and Early Years:

Born in Utica, NY in 1943, Bob is a graduate of Duquesne University (Master's in Liberal Studies--1995), Utica College of Syracuse University (Bachelor's in Public Relations--1967) and Mohawk Valley Technical Institute (Associate's in Advertising Design and Production--1962). Bob completed several undergraduate courses at the University of Pittsburgh in business, finance and economics. He worked in various advertising and promotion posts for the *Utica Observer Dispatch* and the *Syracuse Post-Standard* (1961-64) and was trained and served as a photographer in the New York and Pennsylvania Air National Guard and U.S. Air Force (1964-1970). During those years (which began as reserve duty but included activation for nearly a year in 1968) Bob served as a photojournalist in the public information function. It is notable that this combination of educational experiences embraces the community college system, the U.S. military training schools and three major, distinguished universities. Bob's interests and enthusiasm for the mass media, public relations and advertising professions were kindled at an early age and have remained an intense personal and professional interest.

Business and Professional Background:

Moving to Pittsburgh in 1967, Bob first worked as Assistant Manager of Public Relations for Pittsburgh Corning Corp. (subsidiary of PPG and Corning Glass). Responsibilities there included employee communications (including speechwriting), publications and product publicity. Bob served as liaison with both Burson-Marsteller and Ketchum public relations which were Pittsburgh Corning's agencies. During that time, Bob was active in Associated Editors Society of Pittsburgh (AESOP) which later became the Pittsburgh Chapter of International Association of Business Communicators.

In 1969, Bob joined Koppers Company, Inc. (a FORTUNE 200 company) holding positions with gradually increasing responsibility in corporate and integrated marketing communications. These included responsibilities for the advertising and public relations programs, shareholder/financial communications, community relations, product publicity campaigns, internal communications relating to employee quality improvement programs, environmental issues communications, government relations, corporate donations programs (as Director of the Koppers Company Foundation), public affairs, community partnerships, executive communications and media training.

Koppers was acquired in a highly publicized and bitterly contested 1988 hostile takeover which required extensive work with Hill and Knowlton and a much synchronized partnership with several law firms and all of the internal departments of Koppers. At that time Bob was Director of Public Relations and managed the Koppers Company Foundation and Corporate Communications Department. After the takeover Bob briefly headed corporate communications for PNC Financial Corp as Senior Vice President, Corporate and Public Affairs.

Bob started a communications consulting practice (advertising, public relations, and writing) in 1990. Clients included Koppers and former units of that company as well as assignments for PPG Industries, Ketchum, Family Services of Western Pennsylvania, United Way and the University of Pittsburgh. That practice continued for about 10 years.

Teaching Background:

Courses Bob teaches and supervises include advertising, mass media studies and public relations with subjects ranging from strategic planning for integrated marketing communications to crisis communications. Under Bob's direction Point Park University students are active participants in the National Student Advertising Competition sponsored by the American Advertising Federation, and regarded as the highest professional development experience for future professionals in integrated marketing communications. He has taught undergraduate and graduate school and conducted professional development and mentoring with communications practitioners. He advises both the Point Park student chapters of Public Relations Student Society of America and American Advertising Federation.

Bob helped to form the Integrated Marketing Communications Program, a Saturday accelerated undergraduate initiative now in its 16th year. He has also served in top administrative positions during the transition of Point Park's Journalism and Mass Communications Department to a fully accredited School of Communication. He chairs the Faculty Budget and Finance Committee and served as the founding chair of both the Faculty Development and the Marketing and Communications committees of Point Park's Faculty Assembly.

For 12 years Bob taught the Environmental Public Relations graduate course as an adjunct professor at Duquesne University in the summers. He teaches a similar course currently in Point Park's Master of Science in Environmental Studies program. Bob is a frequent lecturer at area schools and annually conducts a several session high school workshop on advertising and public relations for local high school students in the Allegheny Intermediate Unit's Gifted and Talented programs.

Advising students on professional career choices is a major responsibility for Bob and all members of the Point Park faculty. Coursework in all levels, from freshman through senior levels has an orientation toward real world applications and permits the students to work on team and individual projects that enable them to "test drive" careers and make informed choices toward their professional future. Much of this work is for real clients in the non-profit sectors and students become advertising and public relations counselors and agencies for such

organizations as Alzheimers' Association, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Carnegie Library, Focus on Renewal (McKees Rocks), Kingsley Association, Make a Wish, Pittsburgh Passion (women's professional football), Pittsburgh Project, Visit Pittsburgh and for Point Park University. Bob is directly involved and teaches the capstone courses taken by public relations and advertising majors in their senior year.

Related Professional and Community Information:

An accredited member of the Public Relations Society of America, Bob served as president of the Pittsburgh Chapter and is on their board as Education Chair. In 1999, that chapter selected him as one of 10 "Local Legends in Public Relations" and in 2001 he was elected to the national PRSA College of Fellows, an honor reserved for fewer than 500 of that organization's 20,000 members. In 2002, Bob was named to the Pittsburgh PRSA Hall of Fame, and in 2007 PRSA named their annual scholarship "The Bob O'Gara Renaissance Student Scholar". In 2008 he was named the Business Communicator of the Year by the Pittsburgh Chapter of International Association of Business Communicators. A member of the Pittsburgh Advertising Federation, Bob coordinates education activities for Point Park with them as well as for the Media Association of Pittsburgh. In the community, Bob serves on the board of Mainstay Life Services (group homes for individuals with developmental disabilities) and on the Community Gardens and Greenspace Advisory Committee of Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. A member of Leadership Pittsburgh, Bob counsels community organizations on communications, building partnerships with his student groups to provide communications programs and interns for area non-profits.

Bob O'Gara: Education Philosophy.....

A university education in the communications professions is a blend of history, theory and practical application. History establishes the perspective and knowledge of where we have been and what has gone before us to create a base of understanding critical for success. Theory gives the foundation for understanding broad concepts in our professions. Practical application opens the mind to success and failure, providing the ability to build individual and team talents enabling success in a continually-changing professional world.

Students are participants in the education process, interacting and engaging in dialogue. Teachers are skilled presenters, mentors and pathfinders. Traditional grading techniques (tests, papers etc.) are only a part of the evaluation process. At the end of the day students must produce for the real world, achieving success for themselves, their future employers and society. Peer learning is key to this process and the total curriculum must encompass teamwork, multi tasking and a very open mind to the impact of new media choices and alternatives to traditional media in the persuasive communications professions.

Case examples are essential to learning. They present the lessons of history, the applications of theory and the keys to professional success for our students and their employers, creating value for our society as the end result. Case studies from the events of today as presented in the media and in direct experience are relevant educational building blocks of our professions.

Interaction with working, successful professionals in the field is essential. Every major element of education should include contact with the outside world. In advertising this means the American Advertising Federation, Media Association of Pittsburgh and others; in public relations this means the Public Relations Society of America, International Association of business communicators and others. Students and their professors must be networkers and activists in these leading edge professional organizations and their student counterparts.