

The Relay

a publication for PR students

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Palm Beach

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Recent graduate lands PR manager job at Palm Beach raceway

By Ceitlyn Glenn

Want to meet someone who recently graduated from Eastern and is already a success in her field of study? December 2009 grad Leah Vaughn gave the scoop on the life of a PR professional.

Vaughn, media and public relations manager for Palm Beach International Raceway™ and Palm Beach Driving Club™, gave tips and explained what being successful in the PR field is like. Vaughn was also an editor for *The Relay* during her time at Eastern.

Vaughn has always loved motor sports and has wanted to work in the field since she was in high school.

"I was one of the few that knew exactly what I wanted to do after watching motor sports. I grew up watching it and was always fascinated with the media attention that the drivers and facilities received," explained Vaughn.

Vaughn got her start working in the motor sports arena by using a connection with a family



Vaughn, 21 years old, is originally from Fairfield, Ill. Vaughn now resides in Palm Beach. She did internships and worked weekends leading to PR job upon graduation.

friend. This in turn aided her in receiving an internship at Gateway International Raceway and Madison, IL. With this she was able to work with NASCAR in

many ways.

"I was very fortunate to spend a considerable amount

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"Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some hire PR officers."

— Daniel J. Boorstin

Need assistance with a crisis? Dr. W. Tim Coombs can help!

By Cara Fumagalli

When organizations get into sticky situations, Dr. W. Tim Coombs is the person to reference for crisis management. A professor in the Communication Studies Department, Dr. Coombs specializes in public relations, crisis management and situational crisis communication theory (SCCT).

This past January Dr. Coombs' book, *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*, co-edited by Dr. Sherry Holladay, also a professor in the Communication Studies Department, hit the market.

The Handbook of Crisis Communication is described as a research guide as well as a tool for practitioners. Including the most recent cases in crisis communication, *The Handbook of Crisis Communication* explores issues from chemical spills to Hurricane Katrina.

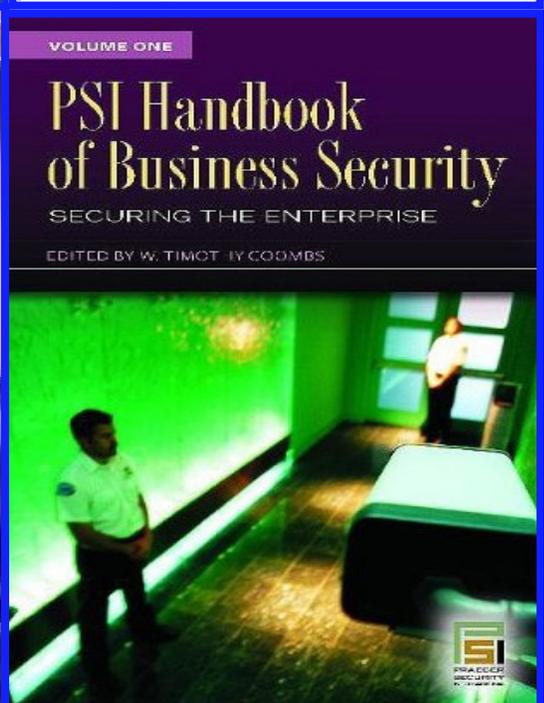
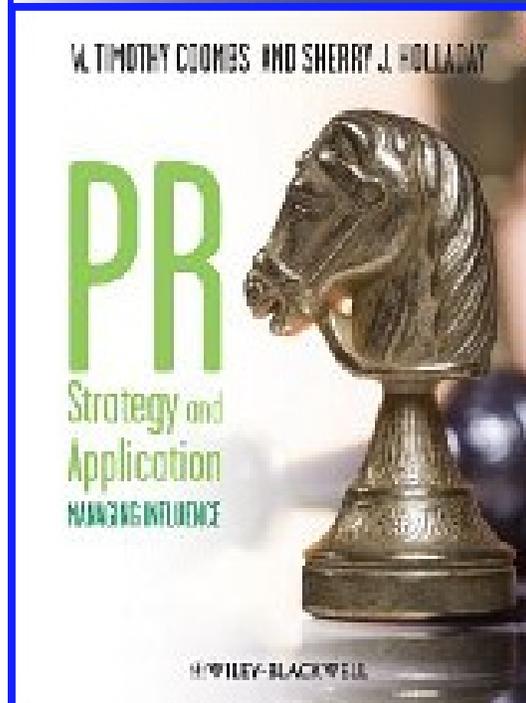
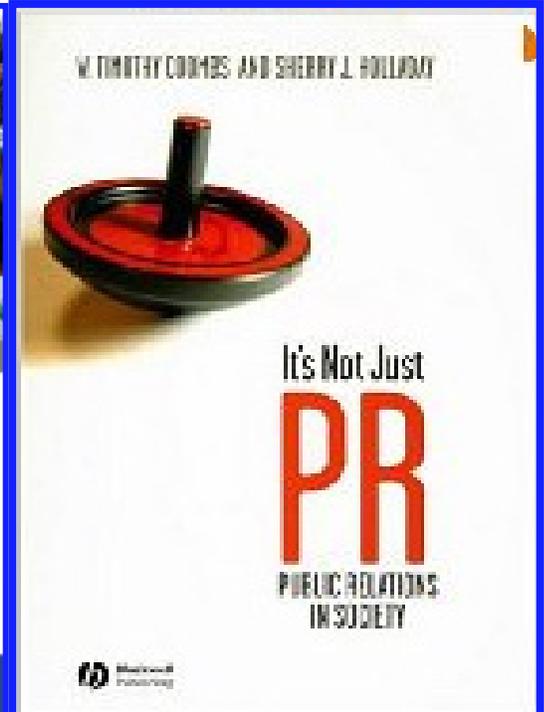
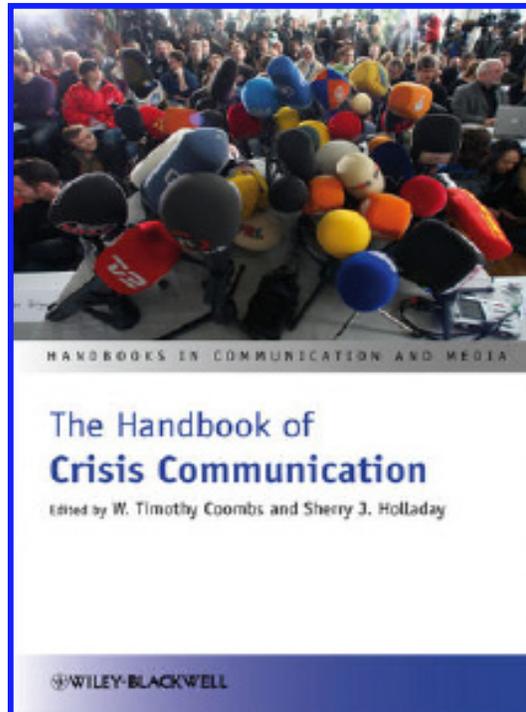
The Handbook of Crisis Communication contains 40 chapters from a variety of sources.

Dr. Coombs and Dr. Holladay collected crisis material from well-known professors and professionals in the field.

In addition to collecting works, Coombs and Holladay added their own chapters and edited the text.

A unique aspect of the handbook stated Coombs is the attention it gives to the international perspective in crisis communication because of its diverse case studies and authors.

Coombs believes the most interesting aspect of crisis communication is the dynamic na-



Coombs and Holladay have teamed up on multiple handbooks and textbooks and can be found on online book retailers. Book images courtesy of Amazon.com.

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From Vaughn, pg. 1

of time working with one of the most prestigious NHRA drag racing teams, Don Schumacher Racing,” explained Vaughn.

“I’ve made many, many connections in the industry and it’s very important to maintain connections made,” advised Vaughn.

Not only did the internship present Vaughn with a plethora of networking opportunities but she also had the benefit of interning many different places from Des Moines, Iowa, to Gainesville, Fla., because of these connections.

Again through networking Vaughn was able to land her current job as public and media relations manager for PBIR and the Palm Beach Driving Club.

“It’s kind of funny how I got my job here at Palm Beach International Raceway. I didn’t even interview for it. Through my internship, I was fortunate enough to work with Jason Rittenberry, who was former President and CEO of Gateway’s sister track, Memphis Motorsports Park,” said Vaughn.

In fall 2009 Rittenberry approached her about working for him in Memphis. Vaughn was worried about the Memphis track being sold so she passed on the position because of the uncertainty of jobs in a newly sold organization. This turned out to be a good career move.

“A few weeks later Rittenberry called me up and said, ‘You want to move to Florida?’ So here I am. I flew down right after graduation on Dec. 19 and saw the facility and signed my offer letter. I moved down Jan. 6 and started working Jan. 11. It was a quick move and I’ve never lived more than an hour and a half from home and now I’m over 1,000 miles away,” explained Vaughn.

During her short time work-



Palm Beach International Raceway has a multitude of venues for car enthusiasts and divers. Photo courtesy of Google Images.

ing at her new position Vaughn has experienced that it is not a typical PR job.

“Nothing is typical in motor sports. PBIR reopened to the public about 18 months ago and is going through a transition period so it’s really tough right now,” stated Vaughn.

According to her PBIR has not had a position held in PR since the reopening. Vaughn is currently working on everything that needs to be done to get the PR side of the organization caught up.

“I’m basically creating my own job as I go along,” said Vaughn.

Vaughn writes news releases, is in charge of Web content, handles all social media accounts, and pitches stories and events to the media.

“Pitching stories is the toughest job ever...I’ve never had to fight to get media attention but when you live in Florida, there’s so many other things to do. You have to make every event sound like the Super Bowl,” Vaughn said.

Anything that one can think of that falls into a PR position Vaughn has done for PBIR in four weeks. PBIR has events everyday so Vaughn stays busy all of the time. A typical day for Vaughn can last 14–16 hours.

“We have more than 500 events in a year. That’s 500 things that people need to know about; that’s 500 things that deserve media attention. That’s my job,” explained Vaughn.

Vaughn said that events can be back-to-back with other events as well. ARCA racing series, a lower series of NASCAR, will be going on at the 2 mile course and 11-turn road course.

“The weekend after the lower series race the popular SPEED network TV program PINKS: ALL OUT will be at the track. It’s a huge production that brings in over 500 racers,” Vaughn said.

Some highlights for Vaughn on a broader scale in her career was being able to work with Don Schumacher Racing at the 2009 U.S. Nationals.

“One of the drivers, Tony Schumacher, won the event, tied a record and beat his biggest rival to do it. It was an unreal experience to be a part of that,” Vaughn said.

The best advice that Vaughn received while at Eastern was to stay focused on her goals, don’t let them get pushed aside, and listen to her professors.

Vaughn also gave some additional advice to future grads.

“PR isn’t something that can be learned in a classroom. You can only learn the basics in school. You have to have internships to really be able to apply what you’ve learned. Without the basic knowledge and incredible amount of internship hours you cannot be a professional in the PR world,” Vaughn said.

To learn more about PBIR and the Palm Beach Raceway got to www.racepbir.com.

For information about internships contact an adviser in your department or visit www.eiu.edu/careers/. PRSSA also lists PR internships.

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ture of the field.

Coombs enjoys the abundance and frequency of new cases arising about current events.

“Companies always have crisis and make mistakes that should be easy to fix, but it doesn’t happen that way,” said Coombs

Although there is pressure and difficulty when writing a handbook that could potentially be used by many professionals in the field.

Coombs explained that writing a book can be an extremely challenging task because it is hard to not include all of the information that could possibly

be found.

“The hardest part is to stop researching and start writing,” explained Coombs.

Coombs has written seven books, 24 chapters in outside books, 37 articles and 12 encyclopedia entries.

The Handbook of Crisis Communication assists in defining the crisis communication research field and looks to the future as to where crisis management is going.

Today, thanks to the help of Coombs and Holladay, the crisis communication research available provides organizations and practitioners with knowledge of what actions to

take when a crisis occurs.

Coombs and Holladay’s handbook can be found on Amazon.com, Wiley.com and Barnes and Noble.com.

To quote from the handbook: “Crisis communication is a field that has witnessed amazing growth in both the professional and academic community over the past decade. The increased number of articles and books on the subject is testament to that development. The growth is positive because of the pressure for effective crisis communication. Crises can create threats to public safety, environmental wellness, and organizational survival. Crisis communication is a critical element in effective crisis management.”

General Information

This is the official publication for public relations students at Eastern Illinois University.

Printed in the Journalism Office of the Buzzard Building.

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