

50th Anniversary of APR

Historical Milestones in Accreditation



The Accredited in Public Relations (APR) credential turns 50 years old in 2014. The following milestones provide historical context for the 50th anniversary of Accreditation:

- **1947:** The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) was formed. Its purpose was to provide professional development, set standards of excellence in the industry and uphold principles of ethics among members.
- **1961:** PRSA merged with the American Public Relations Association and started its own accreditation program in 1962.
- **1964:** The Accredited in Public Relations (APR) designation and formal program were established.
- **1970–80s:** The APR process was periodically reviewed and updated with new examination questions.
- **1983:** As the number of Accredited professionals grew, the PRSA Accreditation Board retained a consulting firm called Integrated Options to review the examination and scoring process.
- **1984:** Integrated Options was selected as PRSA’s new examination scoring firm and applied additional rigor to the process. For more than a decade, the firm recruited and trained a cadre of professionals with advanced degrees to score the examinations.
- **1998:** Recognizing similar interests in advancing the profession, PRSA joined with four other professional associations to unify credentialing programs, with a goal of enhancing credibility and value for organizations and people who hire and retain public relations practitioners. Unification paved the way for formation of the Universal Accreditation Board (UAB) as the administering body for the Accreditation process. Today, UAB membership includes representation from eight participating professional public relations organizations.
- **2000:** The UAB replaced Integrated Options with a firm called Professional Credentialing Services as part of the evolution toward identifying and implementing the steps required to further legitimize the APR credential, based on best practices and standards set by what was then known as the National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA). Prior to that time, neither the APR nor the other participating organizations’ credentialing examinations met legal and human resources standards to use the credential as either a screening criterion for hiring or as a requirement for professional advancement, because the examinations were not based on the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) common to the public relations profession. The UAB retained a firm that had conducted a practice analysis used to legitimize the certified public accountant (CPA) exam process and commissioned it to conduct a KSA practice analysis in public relations.
- **2001:** The UAB recognized the need to reengineer the Accreditation process in an effort to continuously improve and reflect the changing field of public relations, as well as to meet requirements that would allow the examination to be required for either hiring or advancement. The UAB spent the next two years restructuring the examination. PRSA was by far the largest funder of the reengineering, and the other UAB participating organizations provided financial resources or significant in-kind contributions through volunteer efforts by leading practitioners and academics.

- 2003:** The newly reengineered Examination for Accreditation in Public Relations was released. The Examination tested knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) based on the relevant skills identified in the 2000 Practice Analysis. Galton Technologies (now a unit of Thomson-Prometric) guided the UAB to ensure the Examination questions accurately represented the KSAs, with citable references. The Examination also was beta-tested by existing Accredited professionals. The measured, scientific approach, which gathered thorough, empirical data, ensured none of the questions were too difficult or too easy, while all questions accurately reflected actual practice in the commercial, government and nonprofit sectors of the economy. A psychometric statistician helped the UAB develop a passing grade for the computer-based Examination. Updating the Examination remains an ongoing rigorous and scientific process, with questions being reviewed every 12–18 months to keep them relevant to changes in tools, tactics and the times, even while they continue to reflect the enduring principles of public relations practice.
- 2009:** The UAB and PRSA recognized a need for tailoring the credential to reflect the unique KSAs required of public affairs practitioners in the U.S. military. They established a plan for Accreditation that included special emphasis on unique military public affairs skills. Within a year, a dozen practitioners had earned the new designation: APR+M (Accredited in Public Relations plus Military Communication).
- 2010:** The UAB began a 10-year review of the 2000 Practice Analysis. It surveyed 9,950 Accredited and non-Accredited members from UAB participating organizations to validate that as the profession has evolved and tools and tactics have changed, the KSAs remain as important as they were in 2000. The objectives to which test questions are written were revised to reflect today's best practices.
- 2013:** Seeking to continuously improve the Accreditation process and public recognition of APR, PRSA hired the consulting firm OPG to assess the state of the Accreditation program. At PRSA's annual Conference, and throughout numerous communication vehicles in UAB participating organizations, OPG offered recommendations to improve the visibility, credibility and viability of the APR designation. By the end of 2013, more than 5,000 professionals had earned the APR designation, and 36 had earned the designation APR+M.
- 2014:** After five years of research and development, the UAB launched the Certificate in Principles of Public Relations, designed for graduating seniors to benchmark their knowledge of the field and enter the pipeline for pursuing the APR after attaining some years of professional experience.
- Today:** the Accreditation program recognizes the need for continuous change in order to reflect new dynamics within the maturing field of public relations, and to further efforts to create acceptance and value among managers responsible for hiring and developing public relations practitioners in their organizations. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the APR, the UAB will continue to discuss the OPG findings and recommend new courses of action, if necessary, to advance the APR certification while benefiting the public relations profession as a whole.