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**Communications Plan for the Print Futures:  
Professional Writing Program at Douglas College**

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**Submitted to Ms Deborah Skaey, 7 December 2000**

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## Table of Contents

Situational Analysis.....	4
The Print Futures Program .....	4
Professional Writing Training .....	4
Graduates in the Work Force.....	4
Tenth Year Anniversary Next Year .....	4
Issues Identification .....	4
Research and Analysis.....	5
Recruitment of Applicants .....	5
Job Placements.....	5
Alumni .....	5
Competitive Analysis .....	6
Simon Fraser University’s Continuing Studies, The Writing & Publishing Program .....	6
University of British Columbia’s Continuing Education .....	6
University of Victoria .....	6
Langara’s Journalism School.....	6
Vision and Communication Objectives .....	6
Audience Identification .....	7
Key Messages and Themes .....	8
Three words: .....	8
Five Key Phrases:.....	8
Communication Strategy .....	8
The issues that Maureen Nicholson, Program Director, stated during an interview are: .....	8
Success in achieving these goals will be determined by:.....	8
Communication Tactics (Tools, Activities, Media Relations).....	9
For Prospective Students:.....	9
1. Spring Advertising Campaign .....	9
Highlight Working Graduates .....	9
Highlight Employers .....	9
Highlight Self-Employed Alumni.....	9
Recommendation: Develop a testimonial advertising campaign. ....	9
2. Print Futures Web Pages on the Douglas College Website .....	9
Recommendation: Improve Accessibility .....	9
Recommendation: Regular Updating of Website.....	9
3. Information Booklet – Print Futures: The Professional Writing Program .....	10
For Prospective Students:.....	10

Recommendation: Update Booklet .....	10
For Graduating Students & Work Placement Students:.....	10
Recommendation: Develop a booklet for employers .....	10
4. Ongoing advertising .....	10
For prospective students, alumni, and employers .....	10
Recommendation: Develop an advertisement which can appear regularly in print magazines in the Lower Mainland .....	10
5. Raise the Profile of Print Futures by Participation in Conferences and Other Public Events	11
For Prospective Students, Alumni, Employers .....	11
Recommendation: Develop a travelling display and literature to distribute at a Print Futures Information Table .....	11
6. Print Futures Travelling Portfolio Show.....	11
Recommendation: Bring the Portfolio Show to potential employers .....	11
7. Development of Program Relationship with its Alumni.....	11
Recommendation: Create database of Print Futures Alumni.....	11
Recommendation: Invite Alumni to a Reunion / 10 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration .....	11
Recommendation: Invite Alumni to participate in Print Futures List Serve .....	11
Critical Path .....	12
Budget .....	13
Evaluation Procedures .....	14
The issues that Maureen Nicholson, Program Director, stated during an interview are: .....	14
Success in achieving these goals will be determined by:.....	14
Appendix: SWOT Analysis .....	15

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## **Situational Analysis**

### **The Print Futures Program**

Print Futures is a two-year program in professional writing offered at Douglas College in New Westminster, BC. This diploma program is one of the first of its kind in the Lower Mainland.

### **Professional Writing Training**

Students receive training in many areas of professional writing, such as technical communication, public relations, writing for the web, magazine writing, and research reporting. Students also receive training in document design and production, research techniques, interpersonal communications, and editing – skills that they will use in any stream of writing they undertake after graduation. The program also requires that student take theoretical courses which offer training in genre analysis, rhetorical theory, and language studies. Nineteen required courses provide students with the ability to write in any genre of non-creative writing.

The comprehensiveness and the practicality of the Print Futures program are unmatched by any program – whether certificate, diploma, or degree – anywhere in the province.

### **Graduates in the Work Force**

Graduates find salaried employment in technical writing, web writing and development, corporate communications, and public relations. Contractual work is also available in research, editing, and feature writing. Successful completion of the program assures graduates that they have the knowledge and skills they need to be flexible in adapting to the fast-paced changes occurring in the workplace.

Employers consistently report that they are pleased with the quality of work that graduates produce in the workplace. Satisfied employers attempt to seek graduates from the program when they have positions to fill.

### **Tenth Year Anniversary Next Year**

Next year, it will mark Print Futures tenth year of training students to become professional writers. As the program celebrates, it is a time of reflection on past accomplishments and a time to plan for the future.

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## **Issues Identification**

The most significant issues facing the Print Futures Program, as identified by the Dean, are:

1. reduced enrollment; and,
2. lack of job placements for graduates and work placement students.

These issues must be successfully addressed, that is, improvements in the numbers of applicants for the program and in the number of job placements. These improvements must demonstrate a trend toward success, or the program will be phased out.

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## **Research and Analysis**

Discussions with the Dean, the Program Director, and the Work Placement Coordinator, revealed that the reasons behind the reduced enrollment and the lack of job placements were due to long-term neglect of significant publics.

## **Recruitment of Applicants**

An analysis of the campaigns to recruit program applicants revealed that enrollment numbers were suffering because of the College's lack of commitment to fund advertising.

The new president of the College is keen to support the Print Futures Program as she believes that it has the potential to bring academic recognition to the College. The program's success adds to the success of the institution as a whole. The new president is backing up her commitment with funding to rectify the situation. However, if this infusion of money does not have significant results, that is, results that indicate a reversal of a declining trend, then the College has no choice but to phase out the Print Futures program.

## **Job Placements**

Successful job placements had been slowly decreasing over the past four years. It was revealed that the work of maintaining relationships with potential employers had stopped, and that there were job placements at all were because of the high quality of program students' work. Successful job placements were occurring only from formerly satisfied employers returning to Print Futures when they have openings. There had been no work done to develop relationships with new employers.

## **Alumni**

Discussions with the members of the Print Futures Advisory Committee, particularly the Alumni representatives, revealed that only a small number of alumni are known. Of those, the majority feel some negativity towards the program due to its lack of contact with them. We assume that this small number of alumni's sentiment is representative of the larger group of alumni.

The Alumni representatives have convinced the Print Futures leadership that as a group, the alumni have a lot to offer the program. And that the development of a relationship with the program alumni will bring benefits to both the program and the graduates.

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## Competitive Analysis

### Simon Fraser University's Continuing Studies, The Writing & Publishing Program

Offers certificates in:

- Business Writing, Public Relations and Marketing Communication
- Technical Communication
- Publishing
- Editing
- Creative Writing

Excellent website describing its course offerings.

Wide distribution of high quality booklet, updated annually, which provides course descriptions and information about its certificate programs.

### University of British Columbia's Continuing Education

- Offers a few courses from The Writing Centre

### University of Victoria

- Professional Writing Diploma, 8-month post-graduate
- Public Relations Certificate, 3 years part-time

Excellent website describing its course offerings, as well as links to other relevant information.

### Langara's Journalism School

Journalism program offers:

- a four-term plus summer practicum Diploma
- a post-graduate two-term certificate

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## Vision and Communication Objectives

The comprehensiveness and the practicality of the Print Futures program are unmatched by any program – whether certificate, diploma, or degree – anywhere in the province.

All communications with the program's publics must reflect this vision. This communication plan is based on portraying this vision in such a way that all communication efforts reveal the program's high standards in professional written communication.

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## Audience Identification

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<b>Douglas College</b>	Instructors Program Director Work Placement Coordinator Faculty Dean College Administration Advisory Committee	Maureen Nicholson Mahara Sinclair Dr Lorna McCallum
<b>Print Futures Students</b>	Alumni 1 <sup>st</sup> year students 2 <sup>nd</sup> year students part-time students prospective students	Rep: David Hamilton Rep: Sharon Twiss Rep: Carla Elm & Catherine Jones
<b>Professional Associations</b>	Advisory Committee Society for Technical Communicators (STC) International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) Periodical Writers Association of Canada (PWAC) Canadian Authors Association (CAA) Editors Association of Canada (EAC)	
<b>Employers</b>	of Graduates of Work Placement Students other potential employers	
<b>Competitors</b>	SFU's Continuing Education, The Writing & Publishing Program UBC's Continuing Education, Langara's Journalism Program UVic's	

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## Key Messages and Themes

### Three words:

- ♦ excellence ♦ comprehensiveness ♦ practicality

### Five Key Phrases:

Print Futures provides graduates with

- specialized skills, the tools of the writer, and a foundation in rhetoric and genre analysis.
- its rigorous two-year diploma program.
- competence and confidence.

Print Futures graduates make a contribution to your organization through their

- set of transferable skills.
- ability to adapt to the continually changing needs of the work place.

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## Communication Strategy

### The issues that Maureen Nicholson, Program Director, stated during an interview are:

1. Improving awareness of the program's existence within three groups:
  - potential applicants / prospective students, or those who are interested in pursuing an educational program in professional writing
  - the membership of professional writing associations
  - members of the business community, particularly those who would hire graduates or work practicum students.
2. Increasing the number of applicants to the program that have an excellent chance of succeeding within its rigorous program of study.
3. Improving program's relationship with Print Futures Alumni.

### Success in achieving these goals will be determined by:

1. Research within the three groups stated in number one, an increase in awareness of the program, that is, their ability to name the program and where it is located, that it is a two year program, and that it provides broad-based training in all streams of professional writing.
2. Number of informational requests to the program to increase, number of participants in Print Futures information sessions to increase, number of applicants to increase.

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## Communication Tactics (Tools, Activities, Media Relations)

### For Prospective Students:

#### 1. Spring Advertising Campaign

##### *Highlight Working Graduates*

In the past, advertisements have had a photo and testimonial from a successful working alumni. This is excellent, and should continue.

##### *Highlight Employers*

For this campaign, it would also be beneficial to have advertisements that include and photo and testimonial from an employer who is pleased with hiring a Print Futures graduate. It should be a series, and reach across the professional writing streams. For example, CreoScitex hires a technical writer; BC Hydro hires a communications officer.

##### *Highlight Self-Employed Alumni*

Include photo and testimonial from self-employed alumni who credit their success with the excellent training they received from Print Futures. This series would benefit from having a diversity of writing careers represented such as contractual technical writers, editors, periodical writers, and corporate writers.

##### *Recommendation: Develop a testimonial advertising campaign.*

This series of advertisements can run four weeks before the deadline for program applications, and four weeks before September (the “return to school” season).

Print vehicles: The Georgia Straight, The Saturday Vancouver Sun Mix Section, Business in Vancouver, and Lower Mainland weeklies.

#### 2. Print Futures Web Pages on the Douglas College Website

##### *Recommendation: Improve Accessibility*

For her work placement in the summer of 1999, Maureen Egan developed a Print Futures website which is accessed through the Douglas College website. It was only through contact with Maureen herself that I learned the website address: <http://www.douglas.bc.ca/prfu/Index.htm>.

Access to this site must be added to any web page on the Douglas College site that references the Print Futures program. Accessibility would also be improved if the website’s URL were included in any literature about the program. Usefulness of the website could be determined by adding a “hits” counter to the website. The addition of a “guest book” to the website could provide qualitative information to the program about the questions and concerns of prospective students.

##### *Recommendation: Regular Updating of Website*

Regular updating of the site with both information and design would ensure that visitors would return. The Print Futures website should reflect the same high standards in content and design that the program itself is dedicated to achieving.

The program should develop a work placement to conduct this upgrading. The Print Futures student could begin by doing an analysis of content and design of those sites of a similar nature and theme. A report with recommendations to improve the Print Futures website would be generated by this research. Project planning would organize the details of what and when tasks should be done. And then the work of updating the site could begin. Funding for such a thorough work placement should be sought through College and Government funding programs. This upgrading of the website should be an annual task.

The program would benefit from having an interesting and vibrant website, as the site would become a link to prospective students. And a Print Futures student would benefit from the work placement and the experience.

### **3. Information Booklet – Print Futures: The Professional Writing Program**

#### ***For Prospective Students:***

The Communications & Marketing Office has produced an eight-page, 5½" x 8" booklet which describes the program to prospective students. An analysis of the literature distributed by the competition should be conducted to determine if Print Futures is portraying its program as effectively as other programs do theirs.

#### ***Recommendation: Update Booklet***

This booklet should be updated and expanded to reflect the thoroughness of the Print Futures program in comparison with other programs' distributed literature.

#### ***For Graduating Students & Work Placement Students:***

The audience of the previously mentioned booklet are prospective students. All the information is provided from that point of view. However, this information would assist both graduating students and students looking for work placements, if the information were provided from the point of view of the employer. That is, what benefits does training in this program bring to an employer. A focus on the comprehensiveness of the program would further enhance the credibility of the program in the eyes of employers.

#### ***Recommendation: Develop a booklet for employers***

Another booklet using the same information but focused on employers as the intended audience should be developed.

### **4. Ongoing advertising**

#### **For prospective students, alumni, and employers**

Print Futures must maintain its name and identity within these three publics.

By advertising regularly in magazines which prospective students read, the program's name and purpose will be maintained as an educational option for those who might be interested in pursuing a career as professional writers.

Alumni will benefit because the program from which they have received their credentials will be perceived as the quality program it is.

Potential employers will also become familiar with the program, and their interest in hiring graduates and work placement students will be piqued.

#### ***Recommendation: Develop an advertisement which can appear regularly in print magazines in the Lower Mainland***

This advertisement would appear in The Georgia Straight, the Saturday Vancouver Sun Mix Section, Business in Vancouver, professional writing associations' newsletters, Event.

## **5. Raise the Profile of Print Futures by Participation in Conferences and Other Public Events**

### **For Prospective Students, Alumni, Employers**

Print Futures should take every opportunity to participate in public events by having an information table. This is an opportunity to have a real person meeting the various publics, and an opportunity for the program to collect qualitative data regarding the questions and issues that these publics bring forward.

#### ***Recommendation: Develop a travelling display and literature to distribute at a Print Futures Information Table***

Public events to participate in: Douglas College Open House, all writers conferences in the Lower Mainland, all professional writer association conferences, all career fairs at post-secondary institutions.

The Information Table display could be created by Print Futures students as part of a class project in their public relations class. Annual assessment of the effectiveness of the display and its design could remain a class project for each successive group of students.

## **6. Print Futures Travelling Portfolio Show**

The Annual Graduating Year Portfolio Show is a project of the class' Professional Readiness II class. Currently, it takes place in late afternoon to early evening in a room on campus. The location and timing is very institution-centred, that is, it is not easy for employers who not familiar with the College to come to the portfolio show of people they don't know.

#### ***Recommendation: Bring the Portfolio Show to potential employers***

The graduating class could organize with the professional writing associations to bring their portfolio show to association meetings as part of their programming. The class would be responsible for developing a Print Futures display, and for developing relationships with the associations as defined in the Audience Analysis section of this report.

Publics impacted: Graduating Students, Employers, Alumni, Professional Associations.

## **7. Development of Program Relationship with its Alumni**

Alumni are a significant resource who are ignored at the program's peril. Alumni can promote the program to prospective students through invaluable word-of-mouth recommendation. Alumni can also be employers, or have the ability to influence employers on behalf of graduates and work placement students.

The program does not have a relationship with an identified group of Alumni. The celebration of the program's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, together with the program's new leadership, provide an excellent opportunity to forge that relationship.

#### ***Recommendation: Create database of Print Futures Alumni***

This could be a work placement research project. The student could contact professional associations, and known alumni, to begin the search for current contact information.

#### ***Recommendation: Invite Alumni to a Reunion / 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration***

Alumni should be issued special invitations to this Celebration.

#### ***Recommendation: Invite Alumni to participate in Print Futures List Serve***

This networking opportunity already exists, thanks to PRFU student, Jason Kurylo. Once more alumni names are known, they can be invited individually to participate on the list.

## Critical Path

<b>Tactic</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>Finish</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>
Develop a testimonial advertising campaign.	February	August	Communications & Marketing Dept
Improve Accessibility to website	May	August	Work Placement Student / PRFU Program
Regular Updating of Website	January	April	PRFU340 Class / PRFU Program
Update Booklet	January	April	Communications & Marketing Dept
Develop a booklet for employers	March	April	Communications & Marketing Dept
Develop an advertisement which can appear regularly in print magazines in the Lower Mainland	June	July	Communications & Marketing Dept
Develop a travelling display and literature to distribute at a Print Futures Information Table	July	September	Communications & Marketing Dept
Bring the Portfolio Show to potential employers	January	April	PRFU495 Class / PRFU Program
Create database of Print Futures Alumni	January	April	Work Placement Student / PRFU Program
Invite Alumni to a Reunion / 10 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration	May	August	Work Placement Student / PRFU Program
Invite Alumni to participate in Print Futures List Serve	August	August	Work Placement Student / PRFU Program

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## Budget

<b>Tactic</b>	<b>Tactic Cost</b>
Develop a testimonial advertising campaign	\$ 50,000.00
Improve accessibility of website	5,000.00
Regular updating of website	500.00
Update Print Futures Information booklet	10,000.00
Develop an Information booklet for employers	5,000.00
Develop an advertisement which can appear regularly in print magazines in the Lower Mainland	30,000.00
Develop a travelling display and literature to distribute at a Print Futures Information Table	2,500.00
Bring the Portfolio Show to potential employers	1,000.00
Create database of Print Futures Alumni	5,000.00
Invite Alumni to a Reunion / 10 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration	1,000.00
Invite Alumni to participate in Print Futures List Serve	0.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 110,000.00</b>

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## Evaluation Procedures

### The issues that Maureen Nicholson, Program Director, stated during an interview are:

1. Improving awareness of the program's existence within three groups:
  - potential applicants / prospective students, or those who are interested in pursuing an educational program in professional writing
  - the membership of professional writing associations
  - members of the business community, particularly those who would hire graduates or work practicum students.
2. Increasing the number of applicants to the program that have an excellent chance of succeeding within its rigorous program of study.
3. Improving program's relationship with Print Futures Alumni.

### Success in achieving these goals will be determined by:

1. Research within the three groups stated in number one, an increase in awareness of the program, that is, their ability to name the program and where it is located, that it is a two year program, and that it provides broad-based training in all streams of professional writing.
2. Number of informational requests to the program to increase, number of participants in Print Futures information sessions to increase, number of applicants to increase.

These evaluations will be conducted at the beginning of the campaign to establish a benchmark with which to assess the successful implementation of this communications plan.

Research will then be conducted after the next intake of new students, and two months after the 10<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary.

## Appendix: SWOT Analysis

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weakness</b>
INTERNAL	<p>full-time program</p> <p>some courses offered in evenings</p> <p>taught by working professionals</p> <p>graduates prepared to do any kind of professional writing – lots of transferable skills</p>	<p>attrition</p> <p>difficult for part-timers to graduate</p> <p>work practicum program has been neglected</p> <p>computer programs used in classes are not the standard in the field</p> <p>slow response process to feedback from Advisory Committee</p>
	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
EXTERNAL	<p>well regarded by those who are familiar with the program</p> <p>graduates do well finding good jobs in their chosen fields</p> <p>relatively inexpensive</p> <p>Advisory Committee members from all streams of business writing community</p>	<p>SFU's Continuing Education, The Writing &amp; Publishing Program</p> <p>UBC's Continuing Education</p> <p>UVic's 8-month post-graduate diploma in professional writing</p> <p>Langara's Journalism School</p> <p>program not well known in the business community, or by those who would employ graduates and practicum students</p>