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Re: Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)
Proposed Memorandum of Understanding

Dear Ms. Knabe, Ms. Mulvihill, and Mr. Barnhart:

In this letter, the Florida Public Relations Association (FPRA) outlines the association's position regarding PRSA's "Memorandum of Understanding (MOU between the Public Relations Society of America and Universal Accreditation Board (UAB) Participating Organizations."

FPRA currently has three major concerns with the MOU, and the following expectations: (1) that the UAB have and maintain governance power over the APR (Accredited in Public Relations) credential; (2) that membership in one of the UAB Participating Organizations remains a requirement for gaining and for the use of the APR credential; and (3) that the APR credential name will not be changed.

(1) FPRA's first expectation is that the UAB have and maintain governance power over the APR accreditation.

Put succinctly, the MOU seems to ignore decades of understanding regarding the UAB's purpose and governance, by suddenly relegating the UAB to the status as an "advisory committee" within PRSA. In the long history of Universal Accreditation and the UAB, it has never been the objective for the UAB to be merely advisory, nor simply a committee within PRSA. Instead history shows us that the UAB was intended and slated to, in fact, one day become independent itself. FPRA's concern at this time is not that the UAB gain independent agency status, but that **the UAB maintain independent governance of the APR accreditation.**

For background, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of organizations came together to fashion a credentialing that would be universally recognized for public relations professionals. It was important for public relations professionals to have a credential readily recognized by the public in order to maintain the ethics and professionalism of public relations practitioners. Separate, state-administered PR credentials were not uniformly or nationally recognized.

As early as 1984, through the North American Public Relations Council (NAPRC), the concept of Universal Accreditation for public relations professionals began. In 1988, FPRA began investing energies and resources in pursuing the implementation of Universal Accreditation through the NAPRC.

In 1995, after careful consultation and communication with FPRA members, and in its members' best interests, FPRA's Board declined a proposal for FPRA to merge with PRSA, but instead decided it was most logical for the organizations to focus their cooperative energies on Universal Accreditation.

To that end, PRSA board of directors adopted a resolution on January 20, 1995 stating, in part:

"Be it resolved that the Public Relations Society of America will participate with diligence and good faith in cooperation with fellow NAPRC organizations to define a process for instituting a universal public relations credentialing program that could operate independently from the control of any individual NAPRC group."

Jan. 20, 1995 PRSA Resolution (emphasis added).

The January 20, 1995 PRSA Resolution was adopted in conjunction with its invitation to member organizations (including FPRA) to appoint participants in the Universal Accreditation process.

According to Jay Rayburn, APR, CPRC, Ph.D., Fellow PRSA, and past president of FPRA; past Chair and Secretary-Treasurer of the NAPRC; Vice-Chair of the UAB (2008-2010) and Co-Chair of the UAB (2011), by 1997, FPRA, PRSA, Agricultural Relations Council and the Southern Public Relations Federation agreed to pool resources toward Universal Accreditation. On January 1, 1998, the UAB became a reality. FPRA was a founding member. Subsequently, FPRA retired its state-run APRP

credential and put its full commitment and energy into the Universal Accreditation through the UAB.

The UAB's goal has always been to unify the profession with Universal Accreditation; and to create a critical mass of accredited professionals in the public relations field who subscribe to a common code of ethics and a common professional certification process. Universal Accreditation is meant to unify the profession. Universal Accreditation is designed to be universally recognized and respected. Such recognition and respect dictate that one body -- the UAB -- be solely responsible for the granting and maintenance of Accreditation.

It is unclear why PRSA has stated its desire to relegate the UAB to an advisory committee capacity. While PRSA loaned \$600,000 for the start-up costs to set up the UAB, according to minutes of the meetings of the UAB, the UAB is relatively self-supporting and not a financial drain on PRSA. The UAB is paying its own way; and paying back the debt to PRSA. That loan is nearing satisfaction.

History continues to show us that the UAB was always intended to be the sole governing body administering the APR credential; and was working toward becoming an independent board. According to Rayburn, who has been involved with Universal Accreditation since 1994, while the main goal of the UAB was to create and administer a successful Universal Accreditation credential, it was also understood that the UAB would eventually become a separate entity once the loan from PRSA had been repaid. "At each and every meeting I attended, the financial report began with an update on where we stood in repaying the loan so the UAB could become independent," he said. "Becoming 'independent' does not necessarily mean creating an organization with separate offices, separate staff, etc.; rather, it was always assumed that independence in this situation merely referred to autonomous control of the credentialing process. It was toward that goal the members of the UAB donated hundreds if not thousands of hours of their time. I certainly hope these hours are not in vain," Rayburn states.

Lanette Hart, APR, CPRC, FPRA's UAB Representative since 2015, attests that the UAB has been discussed and positioned throughout her tenure as intended to be the governing body administering the APR credential, and was working toward becoming an independent board.

Christopher Carroll, APR, CPRC, the second-longest serving member of the UAB at the completion of his term in 2010, and Co-Executive Director of FPRA from 1999 to 2015, attests that the UAB was consistently presented at UAB meetings as intended to be the sole governing body administering the APR credential. Similarly, Kathleen M. Giery, APR, CPRC, past board member of UAB, states that throughout her tenure on the UAB, that same original intent was frequently discussed.

These long-serving professionals have given many hours of their time toward the implementation and maintenance of the APR credential, and all attest that the UAB was meant to remain the sole governance power over Accreditation. In fact, the UAB formed a work group in 2001, tasked with developing a business plan for an independent UAB, on which Mr. Carroll sat. Ms. Hart served as a member of the 2019-2021 UAB Strategic Plan, a special UAB committee assigned by the 2018 UAB Chair to develop a strategic plan to guide the UAB into 2022. The plan envisions the UAB to evolve into an

independent board that is well-known and well-respected across all business sectors for credentialing public relations practitioners.

The minutes of the UAB meetings are replete with references to the UAB achieving full independence over credentialing.

As stated, while the history of the UAB shows it was always striving toward independence, at this point FPRA's major concern is PRSA relegating the UAB to an "advisory committee" status. FPRA has consistently held a leadership role in the UAB and in the advent of Universal Accreditation. For the protection, longevity and continued growth of the profession and the APR credential, it is imperative that the UAB continue to be recognized by PRSA as having autonomous control over, and full governance of, the APR credentialing process. As such, we request that PRSA recognize said UAB governance in the MOU and delete from the MOU all references to the UAB being merely a "committee" or an "advisory committee" of PRSA.

(2) FPRA's second expectation is that membership in one of the Participating Organizations remain a requirement for use of the APR credential.

As you know, since the inception of the APR credential, one must be a member of a Participating Organization in order to obtain and use the credential. For many reasons, this is a sound policy and one that FPRA insists must remain.

The opportunity to attain and use the APR credential is a membership value to the Participating Organizations, allowing Participating Organizations to attract and maintain members. Said value will be soundly impacted if non-Participating Organization professionals are allowed to use the APR credential. In addition, the Participating Organization's membership dues help promote the APR credential. As you know, the role of each Participating Organization is to promote participation in the credentialing process.

Changing the long-standing rule requiring membership in a Participating Organization will greatly affect Participating Organizations internally; and will likely affect their desire or ability to continue to promote the APR credential.

(3) FPRA's third expectation is that the Accreditation credential name (APR) not be changed.

FPRA and other Participating Organizations have been building the concept of Universal Accreditation for decades, and the APR (Accredited in Public Relations) credential name is a vital part of the brand. For Universal Accreditation to achieve its original promises as outlined above, a number of issues were identified by the original partnering organizations that formed the UAB. One of these issues was to create a brand for "APR" that would be as recognizable as other professional credentials, e.g. CPA (Certified Public Accountant). Since 1998, a significant amount of resources from the Participating Organizations have been dedicated to this end. For this reason, FPRA, a participating member of the UAB, remains committed to keeping the APR brand (the current credential identifier) intact and unchanged now and forever. FPRA requests that PRSA not change the identifier.

Conclusion

FPRA and PRSA have similar goals, among which are to promote and protect the public relations profession. Therefore, in the best interest of all UAB participating organizations, FPRA hopes that its expectations outlined herein will be thoughtfully and carefully considered by PRSA. FPRA strongly urges PRSA to comply with the proven intent of the UAB, and its own January 20, 1995 PRSA Resolution, and recognize the UAB's independent governance of APR credentialing.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Alyson Lundell, APR, CPRC.

Alyson Lundell, APR, CPRC
Florida Public Relations Association
President

cc: FPRA UAB Committee