

# The History of Public Relations and Sports Information in Higher Education

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America was destined to become a land of colleges from her birth. Although only nine institutions had been founded by the Revolutionary War, by the Civil War over five hundred more were established throughout the country. Unfortunately, most of these died before the war, as too often they were established before there was either a means to finance them or enough students to keep their doors open. It became necessary to use publicity of any kind to acquire these two necessities. The president was first to learn the efficacy of personal contact with prospective donors. He also learned to use the developing alumni interest in sport to find support for his institution. The faculty assisted the president with publicity matters by forming committees on publicity prior to 1900. The publicity bureau became a part of the administrative bureaucracy of the college when business interests began to influence the organization of higher education. These news bureaus took on business techniques to explain to the public the needs of the institutions. The growth of intercollegiate sport in the 1890's provided a great deal of publicity matter for the college news bureaus and for the "yellow press" of time. So much sensationalized material reached the newspapers, however, that the public soon concluded that the colleges were becoming social clubs. When the Great Depression caused many schools to cut out all unnecessary expenditures, many news bureaus ceased to continue to support education because it was considered too frivolous. During the 1930's, in order to regain support, the news bureaus decided that a change in procedures would enable them to regain what had been lost. They decided that if the public was given information that proved the utility of higher education, rather than reports of social events, that it would return its support. Since the 1930's, however, it has become increasingly difficult to publicize the role of education, as first World War II, then the McCarthy investigations, student riots, and the drug scene of the campus have created misimpressions.

Publicity bureaus have utilized intercollegiate sport to advertise the institutions of higher education. After World War II, college athletics became "big-time" and athletic departments created the position of the sports information director. In the last decade, however, the athletic departments have been reevaluating the role of the sports information director in athletics. At first, it was thought that the myriad of miniscule facts called statistics was bringing additional funds into the athletic department through increased gate receipts. Lately, there has occurred a trend among students to show more interest in intramural sports and recreational activities, and less interest in the paying intercollegiate sports. Many small colleges are terminating the position of sports information director in order to meet the rising costs of sport, as it appears that the sports information director is no longer a position that is providing revenue to the program. If the sports information director is to retain his position in the future, he will have to emphasize his importance to education.