

PRSSA Members Gain Knowledge at Public Relations Virtual Conference

by Christine Nappi

Members of Manhattan College's chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America were able to attend the international conference for the society, 'ICON,' like they do every year. Yet this time, the conference was held virtually.

In a world free of COVID-19, conference attendees would have travelled to Nashville, Tennessee for an in-person, weekend long conference. However, with the pandemic, the Public Relations Society of America opted to hold the conference virtually from Oct. 26 through Oct. 29. Although M CPRSSA members were looking forward to this in-person experience, the virtual format allowed for more members to attend than if it were in-person. The conference had a series of live and recorded lectures for members to attend, and was still an informative learning experience for the attendees.

"tend because they could have easily just

"I think it's awesome that there was even a virtual option [and] that we were still able to attend because they could have easily just cancelled it all together," said junior Ally Mejia, event attendee and chapter social media coordinator. "So the fact that we were still able to attend virtually was really cool and hopefully it's in person next year."

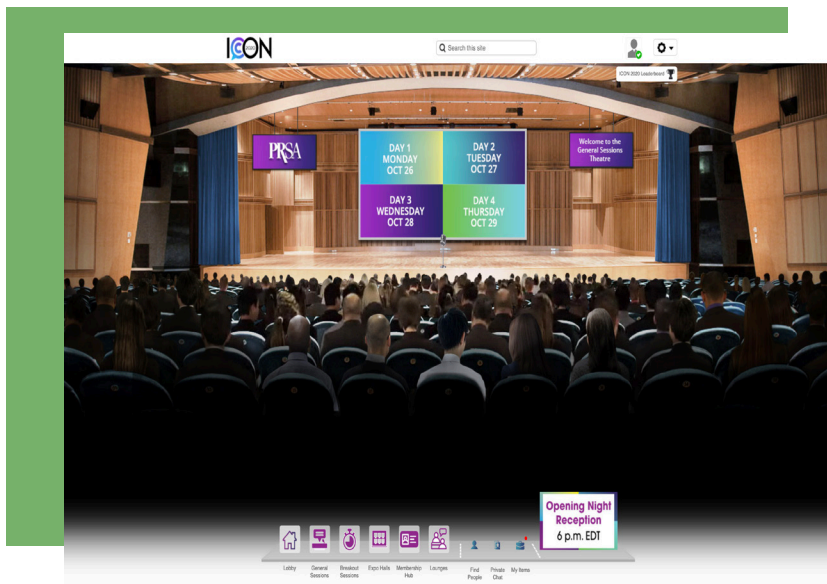
Although club members were still thankful to be attending the event, the virtual format created limitations. As Mejia describes, if the event were in-person there would have been more networking opportunities for students. She finds that the personable aspect of the in-person conference couldn't have been replicated online.

"I feel like I kind of missed that in person engagement, like the opportunity to meet new people," Mejia said. "They did have chat rooms, but it just didn't feel as personable as like an in person interaction would have been."

Despite the negatives of the online format, club members still found some positive aspects in attending virtually. Sophomore Caitlin Ficarra, active club member and conference attendee, found the virtual format to be more convenient.

"In some ways, attending it virtually helped me to focus directly on the presentation and limited any distractions," Ficarra said. "I actually really enjoyed just sitting in front of my laptop and learning





something that otherwise I never would have had a chance to.”

Club members found the conference to be a great learning experience, even in the virtual format. Sophomore Timmy Kwong, event attendee and new member of PRSSA, felt like he was able to delve deeper into the PR industry and expand his knowledge on the topic.

“I’m still taking Intro[duction] to PR this semester, so I really got to see the professional PR industry and from all these experts and professors,” Kwong said.

Kwong also found the conference to be more than just education about public relations. After attending a 36-minute breakout session on the topic of storytelling, he felt inspired to break into the industry and accomplish his career goals.

The learning and inspiration didn’t just stop with the PR industry. Junior Jana Clark, event attendee and chapter vice president, learned more about diversity and inclusion initiatives in the workplace and felt inspired to bring those initiatives to Manhattan College’s chapter.

“Something that I learned was the importance of D and I initiatives,” Clark said. “Just seeing how that could be applicable, even [to] our club here on campus. I think especially now, during this time, it’s so important to have these D and I initiatives.”

After attending the conference, Clark was inspired to create a new executive board position for a diversity and inclusion chair for MCPRSSA. Starting Next semester, the club will officially appoint a club member to this position in an effort to be more inclusive and representative of the MCPRSSA community.

Clark, along with other event attendees, found the conference to come at the perfect time. Club members gained an in-depth learning experience over the four days and expanded their knowledge base of the PR industry immensely.

“[The conference] made me realize how many different moving parts there are within PR and how applicable and how important it is in such a time of misinformation,” Clark said. “I’m really recognizing the role that PR has to play in that, whether it’s crisis management or reporting or your reputation, I think it was just like a really great learning experience.”