

Teaching activism in Indonesia's public relations classrooms: A case study of two universities in Tangerang

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Abstract

This case study describes how two universities in Tangerang, Indonesia – Swiss German University and Universitas Pelita Harapan – teach social activism in public relations classrooms. Even though neither university offers a specific social activism course, social activism is embedded in various mandatory courses for public relations students. Moreover, faculty members regularly involve students in their community involvement projects. Thus, both universities educate future public relations professionals about social activism through theory and hands-on practices. This method is consistent with the objectives of the Ministry of Education and Culture's Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka program, as well as Ernest Boyer's and John Dewey's approach to education.

Keywords

social activism; pedagogy; Indonesia, public relations.

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Introduction

Community involvement – more specifically, community service and social activism – is increasingly acknowledged as an integral element of institutional agendas in higher education. Indeed, the participation of educational institutions in the community is a concept advocated by Ernest Boyer (1996) and expands the traditional (Western) notion of scholarship to encompass the teaching, integration, and application of knowledge. Boyer's holistic approach emphasises the link between academic knowledge and community needs. Moreover, student participation in community services and activism related to the lecture may also lead to improved learning outcomes and personal orientation (Markus, Howard, & King, 1993). More recently, Frey and Palmer (2015) in their book *Teaching communication activism: Communication education for social justice*, gave research-based examples of how communication educators can teach students to reconstruct unjust discourses by working with social justice support organisations and the affected communities.

John Dewey's Social Activism Theory posits that the ultimate goal of all education is to achieve social consciousness (Dumitraşcu, 2015). Dewey describes the school using the analogy of an "embryonic society" (Simpson & Stack, 2010); thus, learning does not come through books only, but through experiences. This way, a child – or student – is both an individual and a community member and society. Therefore, the role of the school is as an institution that nurtures the child's individuality and social membership, equipped to partake in a democratic society.

Various studies have shown evidence of the advantages of service learning and pushing for inclusiveness in the curriculum (Giles & Eyler, 1998). In terms of colleges and universities, Tai-Seale (2001) and Cameron et. al., (2001) provide guidelines for adopting service-learning and community service in various disciplines and academic contexts. This pedagogy has successfully increased student engagement and commitment to studies (Astin & Sax, 1998); substantially impacted the students' social and emotional development (Eyler & Giles, 1999); and improved the achievement of curricular goals (Astin & Sax, 1998). In addition, this learning method is considered adequate because it allows students to 'gain a further understanding of the content of learning, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of social responsibility' (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 222).

Traditionally, universities have taught public relations as a corporate-centric relationship between a business company and its publics. Through this narrative, activists are often viewed as the 'antagonists' whereas the companies are regarded as the 'protagonists' (Coombs & Holladay, 2011). In reality, however, public relations professionals and activists have many similarities, especially in how both handle social issues by engaging with their publics using strategic communication tools. Since 1996, public relations researchers have been calling for research on activism (see Dozier & Lauzen, 2000; Smith, 2004, Smith & Ferguson, 2001; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier (2006), and Holtzhausen, 2007). Slowly, such research began to emerge, opening space for critical contribution to the discussion. Some examples include analysis on activists' use of dialogic principles on their websites (Taylor et al., 2001); framing analysis on media created by activists (Reber & Berger, 2005); research on how activists use online newsrooms (Reber & Kim, 2006); and studies on activist public relations from a critical lens (Holtzhausen, 2007; Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002).

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Moreover, the success of grassroots and non-profit organisations is often due to the practical work of its public relations teams. As L'Etang (2016) states:

Public relations (PR) has had a complicated relationship with activism because historically activism justified organisational investment in PR services and personnel and explained the emergence and development of the specialist areas of issue management and crisis management (p. 207).

However, Mules' analysis of PR textbooks from 1981 to 2017 shows a progressive change in the content of PR textbooks. Increasingly more PR textbooks include activist studies from both strategic business and critical points of view (Mules, 2018).

This is in line with the early 21st century shift in public relations practice as described by Brunner and Smallwood (2019):

Though early public relations leaders set up serving the public interest as unquestionable role for public relations, contemporary public relations practice and scholarship have focused on organizations' goals and activities giving little attention to public interest. (Brunner & Smallwood, 2019, p. 1).

According to Brunner and Smallwood (2019), part of the reason for public relations' bad reputation was its lack of regard to ethics and social responsibility in the early 20th century, and although there was a shift toward researching publics in the middle of the century, the main goal for the research was to manipulate behaviours rather than to serve the publics. At the turn of the 21st century, however, the focus of public relations' shifted to "relationship building and maintenance placed an emphasis on ethical considerations and practices and reintroduced discussion of the responsibilities of public relations to society" (Brunner & Smallwood, 2019, p. 2).

While there are various alternative approaches to teaching public relations, most literature agree that the public relations curricula that will best prepare graduates for professional practice are the ones that include real-world experiences (Sutherland & Ward, 2018; Swanson, 2011; Kim & Freberg, 2017; Sutherland, 2014). Some alternative pedagogical approaches include: student-run public relations firms (Kim, 2015, Bush, 2009), immersive simulation (Sutherland & Ward, 2018), and internships (Daugherty, 2011).

The shift to a more inclusive curriculum that integrates academic expertise and community involvement has also been increasingly occurring in Indonesia. This case is also evident in Indonesia's universities' public relations curricula. Therefore, this case study explains how social activism is taught to public relations students at two universities in Tangerang, Indonesia – Swiss German University (SGU) and Universitas Pelita Harapan (UPH) – by describing how the Communication Department at each university has taken part in recent social activism movements.

The *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) Program

Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has traditionally encouraged the participation of students in the faculty's community service projects. The inclusion and involvement of students are, in fact, of high importance and are part of the criteria for university and departmental national accreditation. In 2020, under Minister Nadiem Anwar Makarim, the implementation of

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Boyer's holistic approach became more real through the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) program, which primarily aims to respond to the educational needs of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era, which has transformed most areas of the human life, including the education system (Lupanda, 2020).

The fourth Industrial Revolution is characterised by rapid advances in technology and the blurring of the lines of physical, digital, and biological spheres in the development of knowledge (Schwab, 2017). According to Schwab (2017), although the previous industrial revolutions have led to massive societal changes, the fourth industrial revolution is unique because of the extraordinary speed of the spread of new ideas and technologies around the world. This has and will continue to radically transform the structure of the world economy for many decades to come. To respond to these radical changes and the challenges they impose, the education sector must also make changes to equip the human resources produced by educational institutions for the global competition (Lase, 2019).

In essence, this nationwide *Merdeka Belajar* program imparts students the freedom to think individually or as part of a team to become competent, critical, creative, collaborative, and innovative individuals and team players to learn and expand networks outside the study program or home campus (Siregar, Sahirah, & Harahap, 2020; Savitri, 2020). The *Merdeka Belajar* program encompasses all educational levels, and its derivative for higher education is called *Kampus Merdeka* (Free Campus). This program includes various sub-programs for students, including teaching campus; internship; humanitarian projects; and village development. The goal is to develop the graduates' soft and hard skill competencies, preparing them to become Indonesia's future leaders who possess superior moral and ethical values (Suhartoyo, Wailissa, Jalarwati Samsia, Wati, Qomariah, Dayanti, Maulani, Mukhlis, Azhari, & Isa, 2020).

However, the *Merdeka Belajar* program is not without challenges. Many universities have difficulties in applying its competency-based curriculum which emphasises developing specific standards of competencies that students must learn. In following the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, there is a government regulation regarding the implementation of the Indonesian National Qualification Framework of Higher Education (*Kerangka Kompetensi Nasional Indonesia*). It is stated that learning outcomes of non-formal education, informal education, and work experience can be equated to certain qualification levels in higher education. The home universities must be willing to acknowledge up to 20 credit hours upon the students' completion of this program. The availability of various learning outcomes of the educational institutions itself could be seen as the potential limitation in implementing the program, particularly activities such as student exchange, international student mobility, internship and independent study. Many universities face difficulties in implementing these activities within their existing curricula.

Revisiting the Tension between Definitions of Activism, Advocacy, and Community Service

Advocacy is an umbrella term used to describe acts of publicly representing an individual, organisation, or idea, as well as the various intervention tools used for such representation. Advocacy often includes actively lobbying politicians and participating in consultative processes. It is usually viewed favourably as the work of

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a civil society to achieve common good (Hall, 2018). On the other hand, the term activism is often deemed as having negative connotations and associated with furthering personal agendas because of its direct link to a social or political goal. This is also worsened by how the media often portray activists who use tactics that alienate the government and the wider community. Some scholars, however, argue that activism is actually part of the process of advocacy, in which advocates take actions such as organising direct protests or attempting to influence policy making. Therefore, it is important to be able to determine when a campaign should switch from advocacy to activism (Hall, 2018).

The Indonesian dictionary (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, 2011) defines activism as:

1. Activity of activists;
2. A doctrine that emphasises the need for violent action to achieve political goals (politics);
3. The flow of expressionism which holds that drama must be able to find realistic solutions to social problems (art).

However, from the Indonesian perspective, activism covers a wide array of social movement activities such as volunteering, social campaigns, religious movements, philanthropy and political activities. Still, the common trend in literature in relation to activism is activism through social media (e.g. Cahyaningtyas, 2021; Arrobi, 2020; Rahmawan, Mahameruaji, & Janitra, 2020; Widiyanto, 2018; Jati, 2016).

The Indonesian regulations on higher education states that community service is a set of activities conducted by those in the academic community using science and technology for the betterment of the community and to educate the citizens. Such community service may involve volunteer work in social activities by the academic community, which includes students. Though the terms 'activism' and 'advocacy' should not be used interchangeably, in practice, both activism and advocacy are often part of the community service carried out by academics and students as part of the *Tri Dharma* (Three Pillars) of Higher Education. The goal is to raise public awareness of social problems and exert political pressure to bring out policy and social change for the common good through nonviolent, direct action activities.

Communication Science Curriculum in Indonesia

The curriculum of communication science in most universities in Indonesia is guided by ASPIKOM's Competence-Based Curriculum, which is an association of higher education of communication science in Indonesia, encompassing vocational programs as well as undergraduate and postgraduate programs. ASPIKOM was founded on March 23, 2007 in Salatiga, Central Java by 35 universities in Indonesia, and now has approximately 200 members.

This curriculum includes the following study materials (*bahan kajian*): basic concepts of communication science; basic communication skills; information and communication systems; communication psychology; sociology of communication; communication theory; communication in interpersonal context; group and organisational communication; public and mass communication; information and

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communication technology; communication program management; communication and culture; communication research procedures; and, ethics and communication culture (ASPIKOM, n.d.). Communication science departments in different universities design their curricula to encompass these materials, as well as the compulsory subjects of the National Higher Education Curriculum: Indonesian, Citizenship, Religion, and *Pancasila* (Umar, 2021).

The public relations teaching materials used in Indonesian universities are dominated by U.S. textbooks, which means that most students learn about public relations – including its history and contemporary perspective – from the U.S. perspective. However, according to Coombs and Holladay (2012), the history of U.S. public relations that many people have learned is not entirely accurate as it focuses on corporate functions of public relations and how public relations emerged and grew in reaction to activists trying to meddle with the corporations' business operations. This misrepresentation has resulted in public relations being viewed as no more than a tool of "big business". Therefore, Coombs and Holladay (2012) suggest that grounding U.S. public relations history in the works of activists could change the negative view toward the field and legitimise the work of activists as a positive and crucial element of public relations theory and research.

Even though social activism is not one of the subjects included by ASPIKOM's curriculum, both Swiss German University and Universitas Pelita Harapan embed its teaching throughout its curricula.

Teaching Activism at Swiss German University

Swiss German University (SGU) is a small university established in 2000 as a multinational effort between Indonesia, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. SGU was Indonesia's first international university with an academic license issued by the National Ministry of Education (DIKNAS) which is recognised under Indonesian law. SGU's objective is to bring a strong international focus in promoting knowledge and technology in the Indonesian higher education system. In doing so, the medium of instruction at SGU is English, and part of its uniqueness lies in its curriculum, which includes two mandatory semesters – semesters 3 and 6 – in Indonesia and abroad. This program is made possible by SGU's extensive partnerships with universities and companies spread around Europe and Asia (Swiss German University, 2020).

At SGU, public relations is taught in the Global Strategic Communications (GSC) department – previously called the Communication and Public Relations department until 2000). Even though the curriculum does not offer a specific social activism course, students are exposed to social activism and community involvement through various classes and activities during their study at SGU. GSC students are first introduced to the concept of social activism in their Introduction to Public Relations class in the first semester, where they learn about PR for non-profit organisations and corporate social responsibility. Then, in the fourth semester, they understand the management process of social activism in their Public Relations Management class. For their final assignment, they have to plan, execute, and evaluate a PR campaign for an actual non-profit organisation.

Also, in the fourth semester, students must take the Project Management and Leadership course. Finally, after learning the basics and the management process of

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social activism, students take the compulsory Event Management class in the fifth semester (Global Strategic Communications, 2020):

Project Management

This course is taken in the fourth semester. Students are put into groups and given a group project relating to different social issues. The culmination of this project is an event that raises awareness of the selected social issue. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, these projects have included student-run webinars on big data and privacy; and, mental health among teenagers.

Event Management

This course is taken in the fifth semester. It introduces students to the event organising process and techniques. As a final project, students have to carry out GSC's annual event, Social Media Week, which must include community involvement and social activism events according to that year's theme. Past social issues tackled by the students have included charity, media literacy, mental health awareness.

Character and Professional Development Program

Since 2020, SGU has included the Character and Professional Development Program (CPDP) as a mandatory program for all students. CPDP is a series or collection of student non-academic activities with weight or credit based on SGU's vision and mission, which is inspired by SGU's core values of integrity, professionalism, discipline, innovation, excellence, loyalty, and responsibility. The types of non-academic activities are closely related to the *Tri-Dharma* (Three Pillars) of Higher Education, which are in line with UNESCO's Four Pillars of Education components.

By embedding social activism projects in the mandatory courses offered to public relations students, SGU has facilitated discussions about real-world issues in the classroom, allowed students to voice what concerns them in their communities and encouraged them to explore the problem and do something about it by developing and implementing a program related to their selected social issue. This activity helps students develop their sense of agency. Aside from the mandatory courses, students have also traditionally been involved in the lecturers' community service and social activism projects as part of their *Tri Dharma* of Higher Education responsibilities, consisting of education, research, and community service. The following is an example of the implementation of teaching social activism to PR students through a project conducted by the GSC faculty members.

Stand Up Against Sexual Harassment!

Under SGU's Central Community Service Fund 2019-2020, the Communication and Public Relations study program conducted a social activism project entitled, 'Raising Awareness about Sexual Harassment in The Media Industry: Film and Panel Discussion'. This project consisted of two sessions targeted at two different audiences: 1. Media practitioners; and 2. High school students. Each session consists of viewing the film 'More than Work', a documentation of the condition of women in the media industry who have experienced sexual harassment. A panel discussion involving women activists, a movie director, a journalist, an academic,

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and a sexual abuse and gender discrimination lawyer conducted afterward. The objective of this project was to raise awareness about sexual harassment on the workplace, particularly in the media. Based on the survey results from the first session (media practitioners) showed that 84,6 percent of respondents felt that through the panel discussion, they had acquired new knowledge about the media industry; and 84,7 percent of respondents felt that through this panel discussion, they've become more knowledgeable about sexual harassment. In conclusion, the first session was effective in achieving its objective.

However, findings from the second session (high school students) were rather alarming. Only half the participants believe that the perpetrators are the culprit of sexual harassment. In contrast, the rest believe that other parties, including the victims themselves, should also be held responsible for sexual harassment. Furthermore, the high school students were reminded that women who are sexually harassed do not necessarily wear revealing clothes. Women wearing *hijab* and even children have been victims of sexual harassment. Based on this result and observation, the GSC team realised that special attention must be given to educating teenagers about sexual harassment. A different approach from the one used for adults (media professionals) is necessary.

As a follow-up, under SGU's Central Research Fund 2020-2021, a project under the title Stand Up Against Sexual Harassment, aimed to raise teenagers' awareness about sexual harassment. The discussion on standing up against sexual harassment issue, this social activism project consisted of three stages that were conducted virtually:

1. The first stage of the project was a webinar with the title Stand Up Against Sexual Harassment! delivered by a commissioner of the National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan). Results of the survey on the webinar participants showed an increased level of confidence among the participants on dealing with sexual harassment, including the confidence of knowing what to do when experiencing sexual harassment, the confidence of having the courage to report sexual harassment, and, the confidence of having the courage to defend a victim of sexual harassment.
2. The second stage of the project was the Creative Arts Against Sexual Harassment competition, in which high school and university students are called to submit their original artwork, expressing their feelings about sexual harassment. This event was deemed successful as it resulted in 93 entries from more than 30 cities in Indonesia and three cities abroad.
3. The third stage of the project was the She Begs to Differ! podcast, with the three winners of the Creative Arts Against Sexual Harassment competition.

Based on the participation rate and evaluation results, this project effectively raised teenagers' awareness about sexual harassment based on the participation rate and evaluation results. This event was primarily made possible through online tools, allowing nationwide participation and continuous discussion. All events were conducted online, but all information and artwork submissions were posted on social media.

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Students are actively involved through all stages of the social activism project. Some students hosted the events. Students of the Multimedia class were assigned to manage the Instagram account for the competition. Most importantly, almost all GSC students participated in those events, and this enabled them to experience first-hand the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a social activism project.

In conclusion, even though teaching social activism to public relations students of SGU does not occur in a course specifically titled Social Activism, the implementation. However, from the first semester when taking Introduction to Public Relations until their final semester, students must finalise all their earned credits for CPDP. Thus, the GSC department offers its students hands-on experience in social activism, working with various non-profit organizations on diverse social issues. This method is in line with Boyer's holistic approach to education.

Teaching Activism in UPH

Universitas Pelita Harapan (UPH) is a Christian university founded upon and promoting true knowledge, faith in Christ, and godly character aiming to develop competent and professional future leaders through excellent, holistic, and transformational education. Accordingly, UPH contributes to advancing knowledge, culture, and the development of individuals and society. Furthermore, the university provides excellence in the academic disciplines and programs of higher education and pursues community services for the development of individuals and society.

As part of its *Tri Dharma* of Higher Education responsibilities, education, research, and community service, UPH lecturers should also shepherd students and engage them in transforming the nation and society. UPH students are exposed to liberal arts education and equipped with a vision of transformation. They are expected to respond critically, comprehensively, and ethically to challenges; act as compassionate agents of change; engage, serve and transform society. Therefore, students must know and be responsive to what is happening in the national and global community. In doing so, they are equipped with knowledge on activism issues. The Public Relations department is part of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP). Therefore, this case study focuses only on the teaching of social activism within the FISIP, particularly in the undergraduate levels of two departments, i.e., Communication Studies and International Relations.

The Department of Communication Studies offers three majors: Public Relations, Digital Marketing Communication, and Journalism, whereas the Department of International Relations offers three study concentrations: ASEAN and Southeast Asian Studies, International Trade, and Corporation and International Security. Therefore, issues on activism are significant for students of both departments.

Social activism is not taught as a focused subject matter in the undergraduate classes in UPH. However, it is embedded and integrated into various core subjects of Communication Studies and International Relations. For example, students of International Relations (IR) must know issues about transnational activism, namely civil society networks that actively advocate human rights issues, gender equality, social justice, the environment. While students of Communication Studies should also be familiar with all those issues, mainly when it is related to activism in social

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media. Depiction of the integration of activism issues is observable in the syllabi of the following courses offered by both departments:

International Relations Theory

This course seeks to provide a rigorous foundation for students to study International Relations. It is designed to familiarize students with theories, concepts, and issues in International Relations as a discipline. The course also helps students apply ideas from previous and current seminal academic works in IR to understand global problems. As an introduction, this course has two functions. First, it serves as a gateway to more advanced techniques in International Relations. Second, it is a medium for students to develop their "international literacy".

The course begins with a state of art and an introduction to major theories and concepts in IR. The introductory section also includes the different conceptions of actors and institutions and the dynamics of their interaction in the international arena. After examining alternative ways of thinking about international relations, this course explores concepts and issues in global security and the international political economy. First, it explores the age-old interaction of nations conceived as war and peace. Second, it explores the involvement in, of, and between markets and the state. This last section discusses trade, money and business, and other related global concerns.

Civil Society and International Development

Civil Society and International Development introduces the history, central concepts, theories, and the importance of civil society in international development. As a new yet vibrant actor in international development, civil society has a significant contribution in building democracy, echoing the voice of marginals, supporting local and economic empowerment, and facilitating conflict resolution. Thus, this course provides a broad understanding of how civil society works, its relationship with donors, government, corporate, and local society. Moreover, several case studies in Southeast Asian countries are analysed using development theories and non-traditional security concepts.

To appreciate the importance of social justice and community as the ingredients to form a positive civil society, students discern meaning from films or videos, watching movies or videos, and class discussion of the content of these media. Examples of issues tackled in this course include racism issues in the USA #Blacklivesmatter, and #PapuanLivesMatter in Indonesia.

Communication and Media Studies

In Communication studies, topics on activism are discussed in various core subjects such as Media, Culture, Society, Public Relations Campaigns, and New Media Technology, which focuses on online activism and networked politics. Flew (2014) points out that one recurring debate about new media and politics lies in the internet's structural features that enable greater democratic participation and foster a more egalitarian, participatory form of citizenship and political engagement. In the era of networked social media, participatory media cultures raise how new media technologies that enable so much are a critical political challenge. In this case, the form of activism, a political activity that uses digital media technologies, leaves a range of personal traces, enabling those who are not interested in emancipatory

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practices to still be able to read and use them as well as freely circulate information online (Morozov, 2010). Moreover, Becker and Slaton (2000, p. 81) argue that new forms of electronically based democratic political organization would transform representative government into a system much less responsive to traditionally organized pressure groups.

Public Relations Campaign

Every PR program needs a plan. Most major undertakings start with the essential process of planning. Planning is a critical element of PR to ensure everyone agrees on the upcoming year's business and communication objectives and the strategies and tactics used to achieve those objectives. This strategy is especially true in PR efforts where a complex mix of tools and coordinated timing is crucial to the successful outcome. This subject focuses on applying the principles and practices of public relations planning and measurement. Students are introduced to key theoretical frameworks and best practices and then develop analytical, critical, and practical skills.

As the final project assignment, students work in groups, campaigning social activism on their social media. Most recently, these projects have addressed current issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic situation, all PR campaign projects addressing social activism are conducted virtually. With topics like "Health Education related to COVID-19 Pandemic", students educate a community of low-income fishermen in the outskirts of Jakarta, about the importance of health protocols like wearing a facemask, washing hands, and social distancing. This program was conducted on-site in collaboration with the students from the UPH Medical School with a rigorous health protocol in the esplanade of the district office. Unfortunately, this community involvement campaign could not be conducted virtually as the target audience were not familiar with webinar technology.

Capstone

In general, the Capstone course at FISIP aims to integrate the knowledge received by students, which is relatively fragmented, into a unified whole. Thus, this course is an integrated activity that allows students to practice the knowledge gained in college and apply it to the general public. In addition, community service and community involvement activities enable students to look ahead and build experiences to transition to future work life. This course is for semester six students, before their thesis-writing.

An example of community service activity as the final project in this Capstone is the 'Get Involved Campaign', a program for education and outreach with social media campaigns among young people against stigmatizing, discriminating, and victim-blaming against domestic violence victims. This campaign addressed the number of domestic violence cases, which have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. Unfortunately, access to services for victims of domestic violence is limited, and handling the problem is hampered during quarantine. Therefore, victims of domestic violence become one of the most vulnerable social groups towards the mental health crises caused by isolation, fear, uncertainty, and economic turmoil that people experience during the pandemic (Kelland, 2020). Following the research of the Indonesian National Commission on Violence Against Women, the majority of victims of domestic violence choose not to report what they

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experienced. Some of the main reasons victims of domestic violence remain silent are stigma, gender-based discrimination, and a tendency to blame victims in the community (Parhani, 2020). These things are caused by the lack of socialisation and education about domestic violence and gender-based violence, leading to the spread of myths and misinformation about the issue. With this project, students offer support to Indonesia's social movements that focus on domestic violence and gender equality through a series of campaigns through social media and a webinar entitled "Get Involved" that raises awareness of housewives and young people or university students on these issues. In addition, this campaign provides information on how people can get involved in preventing and overcoming domestic violence.

Conclusion

This paper has described how social activism is taught in the Public Relations classrooms at two universities in Tangerang, Indonesia: Swiss German University and Universitas Pelita Harapan. Neither university offers a specific social activism course. However, both universities have embedded social activism in various mandatory courses for public relations students and involving the students in the faculty's community involvement projects. This model, in return, has allowed students to develop a sense of agency. Social issues are discussed in the classroom, and students are encouraged to express their concerns about specific social issues and do something about them through the class assignments and projects. In doing so, students have hands-on guidance from experienced academics, who can help them connect with community organizations related to their selected social issues.

One limitation to this method is the lack of continuity of the social activism projects and collaboration with the community organisations. Since students can choose the social issue they want to tackle, there is no guarantee that the students taking the same courses would decide to tackle the same problems in the following years. One possible solution would be to balance some methods adopting the same social issues over the years. Some other courses allow the students to select a social topic of their interest. Another limitation is that there is no guarantee that these students would remain actively involved in social activism once they finish these courses and graduate. It would be good research to measure the correlation between student involvement in social activism during college and subsequent social activism involvement after graduation.

Nevertheless, both Swiss German University and Universitas Pelita Harapan have been actively educating Indonesia's future public relations professionals about social activism through theories and numerous hands-on practices. This approach aligns with the vision of the *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* and Ernest Boyer's and John Dewey's approach to education. And even though the COVID-19 pandemic has become the biggest disruptor in the 21st century, it has not prevented the implementation of the *Tri Dharma* of Higher Education, which encompasses the obligation of universities to provide education, research, and community service.

Future studies on the correlation between student involvement in social activism during college and subsequent social activism after graduation would benefit the public relations curriculum design. Also, as this case study only involves two universities in Tangerang, it is not known whether their method of embedding

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teaching social activism into the public relations curricula is unique. In order to answer this, a comparative study involving various universities from different parts of Indonesia is needed.

Lastly, as mentioned before, social activism is not yet included explicitly in the public relations curriculum of universities in Indonesia. Empirical studies showing the positive effects of embedding social activism in the public relations classroom could help push institutions such as ASPIKOM and other higher learning institutions to include social activism as a mandatory competency that must be learned by students.

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