

REVISITING FUND-RAISING ENCROACHMENT
OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN LIGHT OF
THE THEORY OF DONOR RELATIONS

William E. Swanger III

Dr. Shelly Rodgers, Thesis Chair

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study of public relations and fund-raising practitioners in charitable organizations found fund-raising encroachment of public relations occurring at a rate roughly comparable to levels documented in the first studies of encroachment conducted some 15 years ago. Encroachment has been found to focus public relations on one organizational public at the expense of others. Partly as a defense against encroachment, the theory of donor relations advances the concept that fund raising is a specialization of public relations. Contrary to concerns that fund-raising practitioners would not accept this concept, a majority of fund-raising practitioners in the study sample agreed that fund raising is a specialization of public relations. However, both public relations and fund-raising practitioners had reservations that this reconceptualization would end fund-raising encroachment, preferring separate-but-equal organizational structures for the two functions. The research also found support for a refinement of donor relations theory through incorporation of contingency theory.