

Syracuse University

SURFACE

Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects

Spring 5-1-2009

comm.UNITY and the Role of Public Relations in Nonprofit Community Organizations

Carissa Matthews

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone



Part of the [Advertising and Promotion Management Commons](#), and the [Public Relations and Advertising Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Matthews, Carissa, "comm.UNITY and the Role of Public Relations in Nonprofit Community Organizations" (2009). *Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects*. 482.
https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone/482

This Honors Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

comm.UNITY and the Role of Public Relations in Nonprofit Community Organizations

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

Carissa Matthews

Candidate for B.S. Degree
and Renée Crown University Honors

May 2009

Honors Capstone Project in Public Relations

Capstone Project Advisor:

_____ Dennis Kinsey

Honors Reader:

_____ Maria Russell

Honors Director:

_____ Samuel Gorovitz

Date:

ABSTRACT

Nonprofit community organizations need solid public relations strategies and communications skills to accomplish an array of objectives, ranging from fundraising to increasing awareness to changing public opinion. Not only do many students attending Syracuse University possess these skills, but these individuals are also ready and willing to help nonprofit organizations because they would like to make a difference in the community, as well as add real-life work experience to their resumes and portfolios. Because of these facts, Communications for the Community (comm.UNITY) was created in October 2007 with the mission of connecting students with nonprofit organizations to help them create sustainable communications plans, as well as exemplifying Chancellor Nancy Cantor's vision of "Scholarship in Action."

comm.UNITY is a completely student-run organization that consists of two leadership groups, the executive board and project leaders. The executive board is in charge of the behind-the-scenes workings of the organization, such as creating alliances on campus, finding sources of funding, recruitment and marketing and finding clients. Project leaders are individuals who organize a team of students from the general membership to complete specific projects for clients. These nonprofit clients are selected when they apply for comm.UNITY's services at the beginning of the academic year.

In order to create a healthy, sustainable student organization, as well as effectively help clients, a keen understanding of public relations is essential. For both comm.UNITY and its clients, the executive board and project leaders followed the four-step, cyclical process of public relations. This four-step process includes an analysis of the current situation, strategic planning, taking action, and evaluation. The four-step public relations process ensures that communications tactics are strategic and not simply a "best guess." comm.UNITY also strives to abide by the Page Principles, a code of conduct and "best practices" guide revered by public relations professionals industry-wide.

The creation and analysis of comm.UNITY and its work is significant for a multitude of reasons. Most importantly, the organization fills a void that is often left empty at nonprofit organizations – strategic communications. The project is also significant because it results in two different kinds of case studies: an example of how to begin a student organization that is built to last, as well as a handful of examples of the success of students working with nonprofit community organizations – some more so than others.

From these the reader learns a host of lessons, ranging from how public relations must be valued in the dominant coalition of an organization if the function is to survive budget cuts, to how a highly organized and capable Project Leader can mobilize dozens of students to work on a variety of tasks for a single organization. These case studies not only help comm.UNITY look to the future with a bit more experience and expertise, but also serve to set the stage for other "Scholarship in Action" start-ups that will inevitably begin to formulate in the years to come under Chancellor Nancy Cantor's direction.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Acknowledgements | i |
| Advice to Future Honors Students | i |
| Capstone Project Body | 1 |
| What Is Public Relations? | 5 |
| The Page Principles | 15 |
| The Creation of comm.UNITY | 19 |
| Public Relations for comm.UNITY | 24 |
| What comm.UNITY Accomplished and Learned: Case Studies. | 31 |
| Conclusion and Advice for Future | 38 |
| Endnotes | 42 |
| Appendices | 44 |
| comm.UNITY Binder | 44 |
| Timeline | 71 |
| Organizational Flow Chart | 76 |
| The Written Capstone Summary | 77 |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The creation of comm.UNITY and the completion of this Capstone project would not be possible without the help of the following people and organizations. I am indebted to all of you, and cannot possibly thank you enough for your commitment to comm.UNITY.

Tessa Kurman
 Sarah Marshall
 Dennis Kinsey
 Maria Russell
 Rosanna Grassi
 Benjamin Zender
 Kathryn Lee
 Stephen Wright
 Eric Holzwarth
 Megan Lange
 Kelsey McCarthy

Megan McMonagle
 Shayna Meliker
 Megan Hess
 Kasey Panetta
 Erica Rosenthal
 Carolyn McChesney
 Jackie Piccolo
 Jamian Shapiro
 Jennifer Chaput
 Amanda Coriddi
 Lindsey Steinseifer

The Soling Program
 The S.I. Newhouse School of Public
 Communications
 The Renée Crown University Honors
 Program
 The Mary Ann Shaw Center for
 Public and Community Service
 The United Way
 The Westside Community School
 Strategy

On Point for College
 The Salvation Army
 Transitional Living Services
 Child Care Solutions
 The Westcott Community Center
 Vera House
 Liberty Resources
 McMahan/Ryan Child Advocacy
 Site

A special thank you for Tessa: we are “Co-Founders” and “Co-Directors,” but sometimes this Capstone project overshadows that fact. Tessa, the initial idea for comm.UNITY was all yours, and I am so thankful that you came to me so we could really make it happen together. You are the comm. to my UNITY!

For Sarah: you are the embodiment of comm.UNITY. An executive board member who has always gone above and beyond, a project leader who has given so selflessly to help a client in need, and a friend to lean on in the bad times and to celebrate with in the good times – thank you for everything.

ADVICE TO FUTURE HONORS STUDENTS

Do whatever your heart desires for this project. Writing a Capstone paper on a student organization has been awkward and lacking direction at times, but I am extremely proud of what the organization was able to accomplish. Even if your idea doesn't fit the project guidelines neatly – go for it!

CAPSTONE PROJECT BODY

In the United States, a defendant charged with breaking the law is guaranteed the right to a lawyer to represent him and his interests. This is written into law as a basic right because most individuals do not possess a strong understanding of the law, nor any kind of training or education about the legal process they are about to enter. Since immense consequences result from the outcome of a trial, it is critical that all citizens have access to a lawyer as an advisor and resource.

While it would be a hyperbole to say that a community nonprofit organization should have the same guarantee in regard to having a skilled public relations practitioner as a resource, it is a somewhat fair comparison to make. Without effective communications and the advice of a trained, skilled public relations professional, a nonprofit will travel on a more difficult road to success in most of its endeavors, from fundraising to building awareness to creating alliances. While some corporate giants such as Phillip Morris¹ and Exxon Mobil have enormous budgets to spend on swaying public opinion and influencing people to smoke cigarettes and burn fossil fuels, where is the equal representation for organizations working to help teens quit smoking, or informing communities about developments in renewable energy?

While one may admire the accomplishments of thousands of national nonprofit organizations across the United States, a close look at the nonprofit community in the city of Syracuse and the Central Upstate New York region illustrates similar patterns of success right in Syracuse University's backyard. The

Salvation Army has been able to help 30,000 of the city's most needyⁱⁱ even on strained resources and with employees fulfilling an eclectic array of job tasks and responsibilities, and On Point for College has helped hundreds of Syracuse students with little hope for higher education past secondary school make their way to colleges and universities across the country.

However, it was not easy for these organizations to get the funds and awareness needed to help their respective causes. Unlike for-profit organizations, who often have large budgets allocated toward marketing dog food in pet lover magazines or getting key placements for carbonated beverages in television shows, small community-based organizations have executive directors pitching stories to newspapers, and volunteer fundraisers designing posters and creating Web sites with little or no communications training, money or staff.

The problem surfacing in these scenarios is that public relations, a process vital to the health of any organization, becomes a task that is only completed on a slow day when there is time, or a task that is completed by well-meaning employees or volunteers who really are not sure of what they are doing.ⁱⁱⁱ This strategy results in a lower quality publication or product.

Is it really problematic that public relations efforts are often put on the backburner? Simply put, public relations' key function is to connect an organization with the organization's publics and to facilitate communication between the two parties. Since nonprofits usually have mission statements and objectives based on educating, fundraising, and engaging publics, it is seemingly counterintuitive for public relations to be a low priority.

The realization that community organizations need help with communications programs but cannot afford to effectively work on them, both financially and time-wise, led to the creation of a new student organization at Syracuse University: Communications for the Community, or comm.UNITY. While Syracuse University stands by a commitment to “Scholarship In Action,” the skills of students studying different kinds of communications from across the university remained untapped prior to the creation of comm.UNITY. Not only are nonprofits hurt when they are unable to tap into the local university as a resource, but students also miss out of valuable real-world experiences they could gain by working with a community organization.

comm.UNITY is a completely student-run organization that consists of two leadership groups, each selected through an application process: the executive board and project leaders. The executive board is in charge of the behind-the-scenes workings of the organization; from creating alliances on campus to finding sources of funding, from recruitment and marketing to finding clients, the executive board is the backbone of the organization. Project leaders are individuals who organize a team of students from the general membership to complete specific projects for clients. These nonprofit clients are selected when they apply for comm.UNITY’s services at the beginning of the academic year.

If one glances at the list of Recognized Student Organizations at Syracuse University, the question may arise, “who really needs *another* student organization?” With more than 300 registered student organizations in the Office of Student Life in the Division of Student Affairs, it is difficult to argue that a

void exists in offerings to students. The argument for establishing comm.UNITY is that not all student organizations are the same. Some exist for five years without much to tout after all that time, some start with a strong presence and inevitably fade away, and others continuously build momentum over time. While it is impossible to predict without error what the future holds for comm.UNITY, it can be assumed that the organization has a solid foundation (and therefore hope for a continuous presence over time) because of a strong knowledge of public relations, communications, and how to keep all of an organizations' publics happy and motivated – from members to clients to the Syracuse University community.

Creating a student organization that is built to last is no easy feat. To demonstrate that fact, this paper will go into detail about the process, the hurdles, and the lessons learned, as well as explain how knowledge of public relations helped the club reach a level of success in a relatively short a period of time. The paper will also provide advice for the future of comm.UNITY, since this Honors Capstone project is only an analysis of the organization's first two years of existence. Perhaps more important than the description of the ins and outs of running an organization, this paper will also explore and analyze the importance of public relations in both an academic sense as well as explore real-life scenarios by utilizing case studies from a full year of working with a variety of clients.

As a clarification, the author of this Capstone Project is the Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director of comm.UNITY, but the paper is written in the third person to keep an academic tone. In addition, the author will discuss client work completed primarily by individuals other than the author. While this perspective

helps keep sight of the overall picture, it will certainly be lacking in the sense that the author has not seen every interaction between a project leader and nonprofit, or between members on the executive board and the general membership. It would be nice if the author could completely permeate every aspect of the organization – but as all leaders learn, delegation is key for the growth of any organization, and micro-management is rarely successful.

What Is Public Relations?

comm.UNITY is committed to helping nonprofits with their communications needs, and is founded on the idea and principle that all nonprofits need public relations – but what exactly *is* public relations? Public relations is often confused with one small aspect of the job description, such as media relations, event planning, or lobbying. However, the study of public relations is a broad topic with a relatively long history, multiple theories, best practices, codes of ethics, and thousands of practicing professionals.

To define public relations is difficult, especially because there are many who claim to be practicing the same profession even when they are working on vastly different tasks. However, all of these tasks fall under the category of communications. What distinguishes a good public relations strategy is that it not only involves communicating, but also thrives on two-way communications. For example, good public relations is not just comm.UNITY telling nonprofit

organizations what it can help them with and getting them to sign up for its services – in public relations, it is just as important to hear what the particular public or stakeholder needs, while also continuing to facilitate communication throughout the relationship.

Otis Baskin emphasizes that public relations practitioners, “help others establish and maintain effective relationships with third parties,”^{iv} while Roger Yarrington defines public relations as, “communicat[ing] with the public in a way that will gain increased understanding, acceptance, and support.”^v However, these definitions do not illustrate the importance of two-way communication. Dr. Rex F. Harlow undertook the task of analyzing 472 definitions to create a detailed and thorough definition of public relations:

“Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communications, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools.”^{vi}

Surprisingly to the casual observer of the public relations profession, there is no specific mention of news releases, media relations, spokespeople, or even gatekeepers. One may also be intrigued by how often management is mentioned, as well as the inclusion of research and ethics. These are crucial elements for

effective public relations, and throughout this paper Dr. Harlow's definition, along with the Page Principles (an unofficial "Code of Conduct" for public relations practitioners), can be used as a reference point for how public relations is essential in both the creation of comm.UNITY as well as in the operations of nonprofit organizations.

Scott M. Cutlip, Allen H. Center, and Glen M. Broom whittle down Dr. Harlow's complex definition of public relations to a conceptual one, stating, "Public relations is the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends."^{vii} This definition proves useful for a more basic understanding of the public relations function. Additionally, this definition is easier to apply to comm.UNITY: comm.UNITY maintains mutually beneficial relationships between itself and clients, students, administrators, and mentors, and the success or failure of the organization relies on these publics. Without clients, there is no fulfillment of the mission, without students there is no one to work for the clients, and without administrators and mentors there would be no resources to run the organization.

Understanding the definitions of "community relations" and "employee relations" also proves helpful when trying to understand public relations. The work that comm.UNITY does is synonymous with the term "community relations" because it deals directly with the community, both in communications to nonprofits and nonprofits to their respective audiences. Roger Yarrington defines community relations as such: "it is to conduct your business or service in

a manner that pleases the public and earns its approval and support...communications between the organization and community to discover how you can better serve and to convey how your organization is responding.”^{viii} Clearly, this definition not only applies to how businesses garner support, but also to nonprofit community organizations alike.

comm.UNITY also engages in a fair amount of “employee relations,” also noted as “internal relations,” because of the large membership base that must be communicated with on a consistent basis both to share progress and to solicit help. As David Wragg insists, “Employee communications is not a series of *ad hoc* exercises...all aspects of employee communication have to be taken in the context of an overall programme.”^{ix} Clearly, strategic planning is vital.

There are some basics to public relations that are also considered vital: a public relations professional must have impeccable writing skills, the ability to draft and communicate messages, and a solid understanding of how different forms of media operate, from newspapers to radio stations to social media outlets and Web logs (or “blogs”). However, many public relations practitioners jump too quickly to the “communicating” part of the job while ignoring the importance of having a solid foundation of strategic planning to work from (a flaw that can even be seen in the formation of comm.UNITY). Edward J. Robinson may have put it best when he said, “The old ‘flying by the seat of the pants’ approach to solving public relations problems is over.”^x

Professionals now adhere to the four-step process, which emphasizes strategic planning that acts in a cyclical motion.^{xi} Each step is essential, and a

communications program lacking in even one area will be less effective than if each step was taken. It is common for student groups and nonprofits alike to skip some of these steps because of funding capabilities and a lack of manpower, but this four-step process is the ideal to strive for. Often overlooked is the fact that all of the steps can be taken, at least in a small way, with little to no funding.

The first step is to define the problem and undertake a situation analysis.^{xii} This includes environmental scanning, media monitoring, research and fact-finding. It also involves pinpointing publics and identifying the key linkages of most importance to one's organization. Knowing the correct publics to connect with is vital – what is the purpose of communicating to the wrong, or less effective, audience? Taking this first step is how comm.UNITY was founded. While it was not through extensive research, it was noted that no such organization already existed and that nonprofits often lack a full-time staff member dedicated solely to the public relations function. Often during this step, public relations practitioners will conduct a SWOT analysis of the organization, identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

It is true that nonprofits may not have the funding to hire a research group to run focus groups in the community or conduct extensive polling. However, they often have access to the Internet and Google News as a free media monitoring service; they can utilize volunteers to conduct surveys in public places; or they can even simply talk to current partners and clients about issues and concerns to get a sense of what is currently happening in their respective industry or cause. For example, comm.UNITY has very little funding yet was able

to host two focus groups by utilizing free space donated to us by the United Way as well as student volunteers to run the sessions.

While research might not seem important, it is vital in order to have reasoning and evidence for why a communications plan should go in a certain direction. Public relations is well known as a field that conducts a large amount of informal research, but this type of research is problematic because it does not provide much information besides potential reach and effort: counting of news releases and “media impressions,” etc.^{xiii}

Recently, public relations has become a profession with a substantial level of accountability for return on investment, and starting with proper research helps substantiate the need for public relations efforts. Proof of this shift from informal to formal research in public relations can be seen by the number of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Silver Anvil award winners using formal research methods: 25 percent in 1980 to 75 percent in 1998.^{xiv} If comm.UNITY conducted no research, it might have been a fruitless effort – perhaps it would not have met a need in the community.

With a solid foundation of research, public relations can then enter the planning and programming, or strategy, step.^{xv} In decision-making, the strategy is used to map out a plan of action, with specific goals, objectives, strategies and tactics outlined and developed. This strategic thinking often occurs at a management level, which is why the most successful public relations programs are often developed by professionals in the dominant coalition, or top management. Clearly, as a new student organization comm.UNITY lacked

organization in some respects, and the group's goals and objectives were not made clear – staying afloat and launching its first semester with at least a couple of clients was the main objective. When the semester started with seven clients, not only were the members of the organization shocked, but they also did not have a way to measure results against previously set goals or objectives, hurting the organization in the long run.

Next is the favorite step of most public relations practitioners: the taking action step.^{xvi} This step is where all of the technical communications skills of public relations are utilized, from drafting news releases to event planning. When taking action, public relations professionals implement the tactics laid out in the planning stage to help reach specific goals and objectives. For comm.UNITY this was the recruitment stage, both for clients and for membership. When working with clients, this is when comm.UNITY members create brochures, work planned events, carry out a re-branding initiative, launch Web sites, and pitch stories to the media.

There are usually two prongs to the taking action step: the action program, and the communication program. For example, in the famous Tylenol recall of 1982, Tylenol's action steps included alerting the public, taking Tylenol off the shelves, and designing new packaging. The communications program, on the other hand, involved formulating a message and targeting publics using mass media.^{xvii} For comm.UNITY recruitment, communications involved creating a brand and publicizing it, while the action steps included holding a general interest meeting, conducting focus groups with nonprofits to win clients, earning

Recognized Student Organization status to gain credibility, and meeting with professors to foster mentor relationships.

The final step is often difficult to undergo: evaluation. Like research, it is a step that is seemingly unnecessary or a waste of funds. However, accountability and assessment leads to credibility, resulting in a trusting client and continued relationships in the future. Public relations professionals cannot simply propose sponsoring a publicity event and say at the end, “well, that really got our name out there.” Instead, extensive evaluation methods must be conducted: media monitoring to see how much coverage certain tactics received, looking at attendance of events, funds raised and donors signed up, new members enrolled, etcetera.

What makes evaluation more manageable is actually planning for it in the second step. By creating goals and objectives with set scales of measurement, public relations can quickly report to management whether or not said objectives were met.

For example, a weak objective would be, “For comm.UNITY to increase its membership.” With this objective, if only 2 more people joined the club after extensive publicity for a general interest meeting, it would be seen as a success.

Instead, an objective must contain several elements: a public to be addressed, a category (awareness, acceptance, or action), direction (increase, create, reinforce, etc), performance measure, and time period.^{xviii} Using this formula, the objective would sound like this: “To have an effect on action (category), specifically to increase (direction) the number of students at Syracuse

University (public) who sign up for the organization's e-mail list by 40 members (performance measure) by February 1, 2009 (time period).”

With this more specific objective, comm.UNITY can now evaluate how successful its recruitment strategy was by simply counting how many individuals joined the e-mail list. As noted though, the organization was not as efficient in this step. Yet comm.UNITY was still able to evaluate itself in other ways – for example, meeting attendees were asked how they heard about the club so the directors of marketing and recruitment could gauge what publicity efforts were most effective.

Most public relations strategies are not simple to measure, which is why the evaluation process may be arduous at times. This is especially true when trying to affect behavioral change as opposed to awareness. In communicating with a public it is much easier to change the public's awareness of an issue or product than to actually make the public take action or change behavior. As a result of a great public relations campaign, a college student may be aware that Red Bull exists as an energy drink, and may even agree that Red Bull will be able to keep him awake all night. However, this student will still turn to coffee for a late-night study session if coffee is his favorite energy drink. As Baskin notes, “Attitude is not behavior...it is incorrect to assume that favorable attitudes will result in desired behaviors.”^{xix}

These four steps encompass each different function of public relations, from research to strategic planning to more technical functions. In addition to

understanding this four-step process, public relations professionals must also have a grasp of systems theory in order to best understand how to create effective communications objectives.

While it may initially seem more appropriate to apply systems theory to understand the global environment and climate change,^{xx} it is important to understand that organizations are systems in themselves, as well as part of the greater system in the community in which it functions. Cutlip, Center and Broom note that, “all systems – mechanical, organic, and social – can be classified in terms of the nature and amount of interchange with their environments.”^{xxi} Public relations practitioners must understand the concept of open and closed systems.

Open systems are susceptible to influence from outside forces while closed systems are resilient to outside environmental factors. For example, an Amish community is considered a closed system because it is totally independent from the outside world. The stock market plummeting has no effect on the Amish’s own independent economy, and supply and demand mean nothing when the members of the Amish community grow their own food and build their own furniture. At the other side of the spectrum, a free-market capitalistic business is greatly influenced by the economy, culture, legal issues, technology, customers, and competition.^{xxii}

It is vital to understand that both comm.UNITY and local community nonprofits operate in fairly open systems. comm.UNITY is slightly less open since it operates within a university setting that has its own rules and regulations that do not apply to the outside world. Nonprofits, on the other hand, deal with all

the same external factors as for-profits do. This became extremely apparent in January 2009 when comm.UNITY lost two clients due to the state of the economy – one gave up on all publicity efforts while the other had all funding cut and would no longer exist in the next fiscal year.

As Dr. Mitch Javidi and PRSA Fellow Michael L. Herman note, “the degree to which a system is open or closed determines the extent to which changes can be controlled.”^{xxiii} Public relations practitioners are in the business of change while communicating with publics: changing awareness, opinions, attitudes, and behavior. If public relations professionals can gauge how closed or open a system is they will have the ability to formulate the best strategy to influence publics in said environment.

The Page Principles

While this discussion could go on for hundreds of pages to include all the elements, theories and practices of effective public relations, it will only touch upon one more element – ethics and the Page Principles.

Arthur W. Page, Vice President of Public Relations for AT&T from 1927 to 1946, was the first public relations professional to serve on a Board of Directors of a major corporation.^{xxiv} As one of the major figures in the history of public relations, Page’s philosophy encompassed seven principles for practitioners to follow to conduct public relations in the most ethical and effective

manner possible. After his death, others compiled his writings and created, “The Page Principles.” While these principles guide (or should guide) all of public relations, they are certainly key both at comm.UNITY and at the nonprofits it works with.

The first Page Principle encompasses the most central theme: “Tell the truth.”^{xxv} This principle is guided by the ideal of a company always giving the public what it said it would give them, and being completely transparent about its practices and state of operations.

For comm.UNITY, it was essential to be open with nonprofits about being a new organization without a lot of experience. The organization could speak highly of the student members, but still could not guarantee a successful experience right away. For clients, it is important they have transparency by letting their publics know where funding is spent and how they run their services. In a tough economy, funds are hard to raise, and transparency will greatly boost donor confidence.

The next Page Principle is, “Prove it with action.”^{xxvi} Public relations isn’t just about communicating, but also about taking preventative, proactive and corrective actions. comm.UNITY could not boast about having experience until it had actually worked with clients. comm.UNITY also had to back up claims that it would have enough work for all the members to do, conduct workshops, and bring in speakers to edify them. Truthfully, the organization survived using some “fluff” in its initial publicity, but this was okay because comm.UNITY ultimately delivered the service it advertised. For community organizations, having goals of

raising awareness and providing information is great, but they won't gain a good reputation unless there is quality service with thorough follow-through for all of their promises and claims.

“Listen to the customer”^{xxvii} is essential for comm.UNITY. This organization was not just created by the two co-founders; all the students who gave feedback about how the club should be organized and formed created it. comm.UNITY also listened to the customer by holding focus groups to ask nonprofits what they needed help with instead of making assumptions.

Page also emphasized the importance of “managing for tomorrow.”^{xxviii} This principle illustrates the significance of making decisions while thinking about the long-term instead of just focusing on what makes most sense for the current situation, or perhaps what saves the most money in the short-term.

For comm.UNITY, the idea of “manage for tomorrow” is what drove the decision to wait a year to take on clients even though the organization began in October 2007. Even though it may have been more exciting to start client work right away in the spring, it was clear the organization needed a stronger foundation and more time to organize, create a brand, etc. This same philosophy carries over to client work. While in theory comm.UNITY members could piece together a brochure or newsletter in a week, it is more important to create the best product possible over a longer period of time, even though it involves more investment of time, both for comm.UNITY and the client.

While this might seem a bit biased toward public relations, Page believed that one should, “conduct public relations as if the whole company depends on

it.”^{xxix} This idea goes against the common practice of cutting public relations as soon as the budget gets tight. This principle also emphasizes that once a message is formulated, it needs to permeate throughout the company. The employees should live and breathe the company’s mission, goals, code of conduct, and code of ethics.

Along with discussion of employee behavior, Page also believed that public relations must “realize a company’s true character is expressed by its people.” Because of this fact, every single employee becomes involved with public relations. Good employees are an invaluable commodity.

comm.UNITY knows that it has as many dedicated students as it does because of the messaging and language communicated in the recruitment campaign: “Passion required. Experience is not.” All of comm.UNITY’s recruitment messaging revolved around the idea that this organization is not a joke, but a serious commitment to the community. For our nonprofit clients, it is essential that everyone – both full-time employees and volunteers – understand what the organization stands for so they can exude that energy when they are fundraising, helping the needy, or collecting blood donations.

Finally, Page left the public relations world with a simple notion: “Remain calm, patient and good-humored.”^{xxx} These words of wisdom come to the rescue in the case of crisis communications, but are also relevant in any stressful situation. This year, comm.UNITY’s clients have dealt with funding cuts and reorganization as a result of the bad economy, and this advice would help them to keep perspective for the future.

For comm.UNITY, this advice was taken during the formation period, when the organization faced some opposition from those believing that the services offered were unnecessary, or that the organization would create competition for other student organizations to recruit qualified students. comm.UNITY simply made itself heard in a calm fashion, and the organization came across as professional and well put together.

These principles laid out by Arthur W. Page highlight the ideals of the practice of public relations, and much of the success of comm.UNITY and the clients it works with can be attributed to abiding by the Page Principles.

The Creation of comm.UNITY

Looking at this brief overview of the profession of public relations and its theories, processes and guidelines, it is clear public relations is fundamental for community organizations, and there is clear reasoning for starting comm.UNITY. comm.UNITY must abide by the rules and principles of public relations to become a successful student organization that does not fade away as many predecessors have before.

How was comm.UNITY able to start up and become relatively successful in so short a period of time? Success for comm.UNITY is gauged by student involvement and recruitment, as well as the client's approval of the work

completed and feedback. One way comm.UNITY has been successful is the area of recruitment.

For example, University Union (UU) is the largest student organization on campus. This organization plans and promotes large-scale programming for students, such as top-tier concerts, speakers, and comedians, as well as weekly cinemas showings. UU has been hailed with many awards for successful programming, collaboration, and high-levels of student involvement. However, while this otherwise successful organization has many resources at its fingertips, it currently has no Web site, and has been working on creating a new one for the past three years (the author was on the board of directors of UU for two years). In a matter of a few months, comm.UNITY was able to recruit a volunteer web designer and go live with a beautiful Web site with strong branding and useful information for multiple publics – <http://comm.unity.syr.edu>.

What made the difference between these two student groups? For one, comm.UNITY has a strong understanding of the importance of quality recruitment, not just quantity (“realize a company’s true character is expressed by its people”) and had strategic ways of reaching out to find the best candidate, once again using messaging language such as “passion” and “dedication.” For UU, the topic of the Web site was spoken about at every meeting with little action done on the author’s part as the Director of Promotions as well as on the part of the other executive positions and the advisor. UU did not have a strong enough understanding of how vital the Web site is not only for branding, but for disseminating information. comm.UNITY was able to roll out a Web presence

more quickly because the organization not only conducts public relations and other communications work for nonprofits, it is also focused on doing public relations and putting best practice principles into place for its own benefit and success.

Before exploring how comm.UNITY went through the four-step process, one must know that there are often many hurdles to creating a student organization, no matter how good of a cause one represents or how clear it seems that the idea is brilliant. In the institutional hierarchy at Syracuse University, there are many gatekeepers who must be convinced that the student organization is a good idea, from faculty to competing student organizations to administration to the Office of Student Life.

When starting comm.UNITY it was important to conduct research, the largest component of the first step in the four-step process. In order to prepare itself for possible opposition to come, the organization looked into how similar student organizations functioned to make sure there was no overlap with services provided and mission statements. comm.UNITY also made sure to adapt a structure it knew would be successful, so the founders interviewed Caryn Espy, a student leader from Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE), to see how they work with community businesses and connect them to Syracuse University students.

Even in the research phase, comm.UNITY's student leaders ran into hurdles. These hurdles at first set the organization back – for example, the campus student-run public relations agency run by PRSSA (Public Relations Student Society of America), “The Firm,” (now “Hill Communications”) was wary that

comm.UNITY would take potential clients and members away from its organization. The executive directors of The Firm informed their advisor of their concerns and almost kept comm.UNITY from becoming a recognized Newhouse student organization. Yet, ultimately, this opposition helped comm.UNITY to form a stronger idea of what it wanted to do and where its services were needed most, and as a result the organization made sure to deviate from the services that the Firm already offered – The Firm solely offers public relations services, while comm.UNITY offers photography, graphic design, Web design, etc. As a result there is now mutual respect and cooperation between the two organizations, as Hill Communications takes on clients looking to reach students and comm.UNITY differentiates itself by working outside the university, with clients in the outside community.

If it were not for this two-way communication, comm.UNITY may not have focused on being open to the entire university population, or having as many graphics or video specialists as public relations personnel. This problem with the initial perception and reaction to the introduction of comm.UNITY helped the organization take an analytical look at what it was doing and really ask the difficult question of, “what is comm.UNITY really all about?”

In addition to competition and issues with perception and initial reactions, a new student organization also has issues with funding and finding support and resources for attaining goals. Clearly, comm.UNITY could not recruit members if there was no way to reserve a room for a meeting. This is why alliance-building is crucial. To make progress, an organization’s leaders must network, find publics

and other organizations with missions similar to theirs, and form collaborations. These publics are known as enablers.^{xxxix}

At Syracuse University, comm.UNITY sought out every resource possible, from the Renee Crown Honors Program to the Mary Ann Shaw Center for Public and Community Service to the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communication to the Soling Program, based out of the College of Arts and Sciences. comm.UNITY found a connection with the Soling Program, whose leaders were willing to become partners and fund comm.UNITY's programs, and it has become fruitful relationship for both parties. The relationship is mutually beneficial as comm.UNITY gets resources such as a copy machine and a \$400 budget, while the Soling Program can tout comm.UNITY's accomplishments as its own.

As with most institutions and the hierarchies within them, a university has many political forces to understand and overcome. At Syracuse University, a plethora of different offices possess varying levels of authority. While the Newhouse School may let comm.UNITY reserve rooms in the Newhouse complex, the organization does not have permission to book other rooms on campus because of the authority of the Office of Student Life and the Division of Student Affairs. While comm.UNITY may be able to print flyers at the Soling Program's office, members are not allowed to hang them in residence halls without permission from the Office of Residence Life. A new student organization is faced with gatekeepers throughout campus who keep it locked out,

As a result these groups must be strategic in finding other ways to communicate in these areas, or find entirely new venues.

Public Relations for comm.UNITY

With these obstacles in mind, comm.UNITY planned and implemented a recruitment campaign to officially promote the organization and start working with clients. comm.UNITY was able to recruit 200 students to join the club in six months, and worked for nine clients in one year. This success was possible because of comm.UNITY's strong foundation, and because the leaders realized that the organization could not move forward without the four-step public relations process. The first step was to go through a situation/SWOT analysis and look at comm.UNITY's different publics and linkages.

A situation analysis often looks like a public relations audit, which looks at internal environment, external environment, and public perception.^{xxxii} The founders of comm.UNITY already established the situation at large: there is a need in the community for public relations expertise and honed communications skills for nonprofits. Once this need was established, it was necessary to analyze the organization itself. The format of the SWOT analysis illustrates the state of comm.UNITY in late fall 2007:

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passionate and dynamic leaders • Resources of major university • Leadership team with relevant experience and expertise with various tasks, from Web to marketing to finance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of direction for organization • Unable to connect with students outside of Newhouse • Lack of experience to boast • Lack of community connections |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant community need for services that students can offer, hundreds of nonprofits in Syracuse • Possible alliances on campus • Untapped resources in different colleges, large body of students to recruit from | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge about organization’s mission may create opposition • “Hill Communications” and “The NewHouse” may have already recruited the most talented students • Lack of university support |

By undergoing a SWOT analysis, comm.UNITY realized recruitment and education would be key strategies moving forward, as well as making connections with various resources both on and off-campus. The organization also realized a need to solidify its mission and structure, as well as find a way to market itself when it did not have a solid reputation to work from yet.

All of the identified components of the SWOT analysis show how comm.UNITY communicates with different publics – again, public relations is centered on two-way, mutually beneficial communication. This style of communication distinguishes a public from an audience. A public is aware of its role and is often actively engaged in some way with the organization, while an audience is a passive group that messages are targeted to through different channels of communication.^{xxxiii} Publics are often also referred to as stakeholders, or linkages.

There are four key categories of linkages to an organization: customers, producers, limiters, and enablers. To briefly define these publics; customers are those who receive services or products from an organization, producers give input to an organization, enablers are higher level organization and administration that give the group guidance along with allies, and limiters are those who reduce the success of an organization.^{xxxiv} For comm.UNITY, a wide range of publics were identified. Without understanding publics, a group usually finds it difficult to grow. comm.UNITY's publics are as such:

| | |
|--|---|
| <p><u>Customers:</u> Current, Potential, Secondary, Shadow Constituencies</p> | <p><u>Enablers:</u> Regulators, Allies, Opinion Leaders, Media</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofit organizations connected through the United Way • Nonprofit organizations not connected through the United Way • Individuals and groups who use the services of the non-profits comm.UNITY works with • Community groups who apply through word-of-mouth • Students who gain experience through working with comm.UNITY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syracuse University • The S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications • Frank Lazarski of United Way of CNY • The Honors Program at SU • The Center for Public and Community Service at SU • The Newhouse Career Development Center and SU Career Services • The Daily Orange, The Student Voice, The Syracuse Record |
| <p><u>Producers:</u> Personnel, Suppliers, Financiers</p> | <p><u>Limiters:</u> Competition, Opponents, Hostile Forces</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergraduate students in all colleges • Graduate students in all colleges • Faculty willing to be advisors • The Soling Program for financial support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Office of Student Life • Some faculty members • Hill Communications, The NewHouse, other communications-based student organizations |

Often, these publics overlap, or change categories all together. For example, it may be said that students are both producers as well as customers, because they gain valuable internship/real-world experience that without the organization they might not have been able to receive otherwise. Another example is the Office of Student Life – they are categorized as limiters because comm.UNITY could not market on campus as a non-Recognized Student Organization, but as of February 2009 comm.UNITY gained provisional RSO status. Because of this relationship change, OSL may now be considered an enabler.

With the situation and publics properly analyzed, the next step is the strategy stage. As mentioned earlier, this is where goals and objectives should be established. Unfortunately, as a student organization, comm.UNITY was too focused on its direction instead of on specific destinations (Norman Nager and T. Harrell Allen used the metaphor of transportation: “Goals provide the direction while objectives pinpoint the destination.”^{xxxv}) However, looking back it is clear that the leadership of comm.UNITY covered the basic kinds of managerial goals that are established by public relations when the organization first set out of establish itself: reputation management, relationship management, and task management.

For reputation, comm.UNITY had a goal of becoming more established through alliances with offices on campus (its enablers) as well as working toward gaining Recognized Student Organization status. comm.UNITY needed to schedule meetings with key influencers such as faculty and administration to gain

credibility before it could recruit. comm.UNITY also worked on its reputation on a community-wide basis by utilizing media relations. With placements in the *Daily Orange*, *The Student Voice*, *The Syracuse Record*, and the SU News “SU Today” daily e-mail, comm.UNITY began to develop a known, trusted name on campus and the greater SU community.

For relationship, the organization needed visibility and to gain trust of both potential customers (nonprofit clients) as well as producers (student volunteers). For task, comm.UNITY simply needed to recruit both clients and members through a variety of tactics, and for members it needed a variety of types of individuals: executive board members, project leaders, and strong team members for each project. Tasks also included basics such as scheduling key meetings, creating a constitution, structuring the organization, etc.

Objectives are more specific, as discussed earlier. Also as mentioned earlier, it would have been beneficial to comm.UNITY to establish tangible objectives so the organization could concretely measure success. As an organization that understood public relations but was still a start-up, comm.UNITY briefly skimmed the planning stage and jumped quickly to tactics. While this decision did not drastically harm the organization, it prevented comm.UNITY from being as effective as it could have been.

It was quickly apparent while promoting comm.UNITY that the more interpersonal the communication method, the more persuasive it was, verifying *Strategic Planning for Public Relations*' interpersonal communications tactics are indeed the most persuasive.^{xxxvi} Hanging up flyers around campus helps to get the

word out, but going into classes and personally speaking to potential members brought much greater recruitment numbers.

Testing the waters to see what would be the most effective promotions tactics to utilize on campus, the marketing team blanketed campus in every way that was available to comm.UNITY at the time. Parallel to this effort, the director of community relations reached out to nonprofits in a more personal, targeted way since less resources to reach those audiences were available. Tactics for reaching campus included flyers, dining hall table tents, e-mailing various student listservs and academic majors, tabling at the Juice Jam fall concert, utilizing new media such as Facebook, and “class talks” where members of the executive board visited classes and gave a quick two-minute pitch at the beginning of class for students to join comm.UNITY.

For clients, comm.UNITY hosted a forum at the United Way (a central, convenient, approachable location) that served both a research and promotional purpose. The director of community relations turned the gathering into a focus group to gauge the needs of the community organizations, which also demonstrated how comm.UNITY genuinely cares about the hearing the voices of community organizations instead of just making assumptions about the communications needs of nonprofits. The forums also served as an excellent promotional tool, as comm.UNITY was able to show its professionalism and dedication. As a result of these forums, all of the client applicants for the first semester were organizations who attended.

To reach other enablers, comm.UNITY's executive directors continued to utilize interpersonal communication, such as e-mail to set up meetings. Even if it was a five-minute meeting to simply ask for permission to ask for advice in the future, a meeting was set up nonetheless. The value of this face-to-face interaction with various intellectual resources and gatekeepers cannot be understated.

The last step was finalizing the simple logistics of the club. The system decided upon led to success: instead of starting up with clients right away, the founders recruited a leadership team willing to create a constitution, formulate the structure of the club, and make all decisions about how comm.UNITY would operate. Even the topic of how to pronounce "comm.UNITY" was discussed! Forming comm.UNITY in this manner was critical, because instead of having just two leaders run the organization, an entire group can feel ownership. This sense of ownership leads to increased dedication as well as motivation. Feeling motivated and dedicated is important for retention of club members and leaders. Many student organizations fade away once the leaders who brought them to fruition graduate, a huge struggle and hurdle to overcome in the university setting.

These tactics led to excellent results, and comm.UNITY conducted much of its evaluation by looking at numbers: more than 200 members recruited over the span of the year, nine clients served between two semesters, gained visibility and credibility on campus through media placements and promotional tactics, and the eventual gained status as a Recognized Student Organization. This is one step of the evaluation process – seeing the results.

However, it is more important to get targeted results to decide which tactics were most effective. To do this, comm.UNITY surveyed new members and those who attended general interest meetings to ask how they heard about the club. A majority answered that class talks were what motivated them to attend a meeting – showing that, for comm.UNITY, interpersonal communication was the most effective for creating behavioral change.

comm.UNITY also utilized built-in evaluation methods throughout all of its meetings and interactions with its publics. At workshops and speakers the organization hosted, executive board members asked attendees for feedback at the end of the session. At the focus groups, comm.UNITY asked potential clients to fill out a feedback form. When comm.UNITY finishes working with a client, there is an entire process dedicated to exit-surveying to learn how the organization and its processes can improve for the future. By doing this, comm.UNITY completed the cyclical motion of the 4-step process: using the evaluation results, the organization can now begin a new campaign cycle, utilizing lessons learned to be more effective and efficient in the next recruitment campaign in the fall.

What comm.UNITY Accomplished and Learned – Case Studies

With this background on how comm.UNITY utilized the four-step process of public relations to build a solid foundation for its first year of operation, this paper will now shift its focus to explore what the organization was able to

accomplish for its clients and for its community both within and outside of Syracuse University. The first two case studies will explore lessons learned, while the last three will highlight comm.UNITY's greatest success stories.

The first case study is comm.UNITY's brief experience with Liberty Resources (1065 James Street, Syracuse NY), with project leader Erica Rosenthal as the key contact between the organization and its project team. Liberty Resources is a nonprofit that only recently began to understand the importance of public relations, and had recently hired an outside public relations consultant to help with the grand opening of a new building while also publicizing the services the organization offers.

comm.UNITY was brought in by this consultant to help him with strategic planning. This team made great progress in just a few months and was ready to start with the implementation of tactics when Liberty Resources was faced with budget cuts due to the recession of 2008. As a result, the public relations consultant was the first to be let go. Since comm.UNITY was utilized by this consultant, Erica's team was cut out as well. How could this happen?

What happened at Liberty Resources is a classic example of how important it is for public relations to have a place in the dominant coalition of an organization. While the CEO of Liberty Resources was involved enough to meet with the comm.UNITY project team, he ultimately held the team back by halting progress when he did not have time to give the go-ahead for next steps. If the consultant had been considered part of the dominant coalition, he could have

made decisions on his own, and the work may have progressed much more quickly. With the CEO micromanaging, it took away the role of the consultant, thus giving Liberty Resources good enough reason to let him go. Public relations would be more highly regarded if it resided in the dominant coalition.

comm.UNITY members were disappointed and frustrated that their brainstorming and planning seemed in vain, but this case study shows students that professors' warnings are true, and sometimes public relations is put on the backburner in the real world, even when classroom theory might lead budding public relations professionals to believe otherwise.

Another example of how a recession greatly impacts community organizations was the project with the Westside Community School Strategy (WCSS), who are strategically located throughout schools in the Syracuse Westside: Bellevue, Delaware, Shea/Bellevue Academy, Seymour, Blodgett and Fowler. WCSS needed re-branding: a shorter name, a more cohesive Web site, and a logo that would help people remember the organization. comm.UNITY's services were once again put on the backburner because of budget questions and how budget cuts would affect their services. The leadership at WCSS did not want comm.UNITY members to waste time designing a Web site if the mission of the organization changed. Unfortunately, after months on the backburner just waiting for the go-ahead to continue the project, the project team was completely cut: the organization lost all its government funding and would no longer exist as a nonprofit in the next fiscal year. comm.UNITY members were devastated, and it

is hard to imagine how disappointed and frustrated the members of WCSS felt. After years of building locations in a handful of schools across Syracuse and making connections community-wide, and helping improve school attendance in its short time as a nonprofit organization: all that work is over in one budget decision. While there was nothing comm.UNITY could do to forecast such a fate, it was a valuable experience for our members to see how much work nonprofits must to do stay afloat. While speculative, perhaps WCSS would have been able to survive if it had been more successful at marketing its accomplishments and its value for the community and New York State. Luckily for comm.UNITY, even when WCSS no longer needed its services, the leader from the organization still graciously came to speak at a general membership meeting.

While the economy in late 2008, early 2009 was able to defeat a couple of clients, most projects were major success stories for comm.UNITY's inaugural year. One such example is comm.UNITY's work with the organization On Point for College (1654 W Onondaga St., Syracuse NY) with project leader Megan Hess. comm.UNITY's job was to help reach potential donors. While On Point normally spent most of its energy reaching out to students to try to connect them with mentors and get them into college, the organization started to realize it had different needs. With almost too many students applying for On Point's services, comm.UNITY helped On Point realize that the organization needed to take a step back and change its communication focus. With state budget cuts, what On Point needed was to solicit donors, not just new students.

comm.UNITY was initially hired to create print advertisements and for event planning for an anniversary event. However, once the director saw how capable the project leader was, comm.UNITY became a major resource for the organization, with multiple meetings a week and the Executive Director Ginny Donohue giving Megan Hess a large amount of responsibility. On Point is the perfect example of how much can be accomplished in regard to public relations when public relations is valued by the dominant coalition – by the end, Megan organized 5 different subcommittees with 24 active students working on newsletters, Web design, and much more.

On Point is an immensely successful organization, helping thousands of young adults with one-on-one counseling for college admissions. One very famous example is John Dau, a Sudanese refugee who attends the Maxwell School of Citizenship at Syracuse University and is now helping formalize new health care resources in his home country. To celebrate ten years of achievements, a fundraiser event was planned, and comm.UNITY stepped in to help. It was decided that On Point not only needed help designing invitations and with day-of duties, but also needed images to tell its story. Nothing shows how heartwarming a mentor/mentored relationship is more so than a picture, and having high-quality portraits taken for free not only helps On Point with this round of print advertisements, but will be a valuable marketing tool for the organization to use for years to come. For example, the project team is already looking to put a picture slideshow from the anniversary event on the organization's Web site. It is clear that by working with comm.UNITY, On Point has a more focused public

relations plan than it had in the past, and will also be able to sustain these public relations tactics using tools from comm.UNITY.

Transitional Living Services (TLS) (420 E. Genesee St., Syracuse NY), a nonprofit dedicated to the process of enabling adults with disabilities to reach their fullest potential and to live and work as valued and involved community members, also greatly benefited from comm.UNITY's services. As Director Aileen Jackowski described the help received from project leader Sarah Marshall, "Give a man a fish, he'll eat today. Teach a man to fish, he'll eat for life." TLS is a great example of comm.UNITY's ultimate goal, which hasn't been seen in all of its case studies: the goal of teaching sustainable communications strategies. comm.UNITY will have fully completed its mission when it can leave a client and the client will possess new tools, understanding and knowledge of how to carry out communications plans, strategies and techniques.

For TLS, Aileen's goal was to learn how to use audio equipment. Aileen recently realized that the stories of the people they work with are remarkably interesting tales, and should be captured in a relevant way and not just on a piece of paper to be filed away and never seen again. Making this decision, she bought a tape recorder audio device, but it was never used because she lacked the knowledge of how to operate it, and had little time to seek out professional help. comm.UNITY stepped in and in one afternoon gave Jackowski the ability to record her clients stories.

While this may not initially be considered public relations, its clear that the stakeholders involved with TLS would all benefit from the recording of these stories, and thus public relations has a part to play in making sure this is accomplished. comm.UNITY also stepped in to design a children's book based on poetry written by one of TLS's clients, who is schizophrenic. The book is to be completed by the publishing of this report and a book signing will be held soon thereafter. By recruiting the right students for the job and keeping to a strict timeline, the project leader was able to accomplish in a few months something that TLS had been meaning to do for years.

comm.UNITY has also been very successful when working with organizations who already have communications professionals on staff. An excellent example has been its work with the Vera House (181 Thompson Road, Suite 100, Syracuse NY). The steps for this project leader, Kelsey McCarthy, were clearly different than in other projects. In projects with no previous communications staff, comm.UNITY took charge and did all four steps of the four-step process: research to see what needed to be done, strategic planning for the year, implementing tactics and strategies, and evaluating the results. For Vera House, comm.UNITY was placed in the tactical stages, and given specific tasks to accomplish, from creating posters to drafting news releases.

While these tasks were also done for other clients, for Vera House comm.UNITY was confident that the tactics chosen were strategic because of the organization's prior experience with marketing and public relations. This very

focused format worked well for the project, completed in a mere 3 months, because of the combination of strategic planning by Vera House and skilled communications technicians successfully completing tasks at comm.UNITY. The results for the Vera House's "Walk a Mile In Her Shoes" event were phenomenal, with a charming poster designed, portraying a man with hairy legs and a tattoo wearing pink stilettos. comm.UNITY also sent photographers to the event, and they truly captured the essence of the event.

Conclusion and Advice for Future

In less than one year, the idea for comm.UNITY was able to grow from a simple concept to a complex organization serving nine clients and project leaders, involving more than 200 members (almost 100 of which actively participate in the organization), led by ten executive board members, and aligned with allies and partners throughout the University and greater Syracuse communities. The organization hosted two workshops to train members with skills in public relations and graphic design. There were also four guest speakers who enriched dozens of members by sharing their experiences working at nonprofits and telling stories of their specific organizations' accomplishments. comm.UNITY was also able to gain Recognized Student Organization status at Syracuse University and receive the Chancellor's Award for Public Service.

However, there are countless ways in which comm.UNITY can change and evolve in the future to be more efficient, more strategic, more engaging, and, simply, do a better job at what it does. Throughout this project it has become evermore apparent that the organization does not follow the four-step process for public relations both internally and externally as much as it should. Just like public relations in most non- and for-profits, plans often become overwhelmed with ideas for tactics when goals, objectives, and strategies are hardly discussed. comm.UNITY falls into the same pitfalls of assuming print ads or news releases are the way to go without fully researching audiences, thinking of goals for these tactics, or even getting the opinions of the entire dominant coalition before going forward. While this four-step process may never be used 100 percent of the time, a goal going forward should be to incorporate it more when appropriate. By explaining the four-step process more thoroughly in training for new executive board members and project leaders, perhaps the process will be utilized more often.

In addition, structural changes should take place. In the appendix, the current organizational structure can be seen, as well as job descriptions for each executive board member in the constitution. Throughout the course of the year it was easy to see who put in more work than others because of how the jobs were laid out, because it is difficult in the beginning to gauge how difficult or time-consuming different tasks would be. In the future it is recommended that comm.UNITY re-evaluate roles for each executive board member. One example is the director of community relations, who had a large amount of work

organizing the forums at the United Way in the beginning of the year, and then had less to do. In the future, community relations should be the primary contact with all the project leaders, keeping them on task and reporting to the rest of the executive board the progress of each project. This would then free up time for the executive directors to help other positions, such as marketing and recruitment.

The organizational structure also worked against the organization by isolating the executive directors, the executive board, and the project leaders from each other, as well as from the general membership. See the appendices for a proposed change of the organizational structure.

comm.UNITY was also a bit overzealous by conducting two rounds of client applications in both the fall and spring. These projects take a large amount of time, and taking on new projects in the spring was a stressful process, especially since there was less interest for new project leaders than imagined. It made sense: members were too involved with their own projects to want to leave them for a new one. With the entire year to complete all projects, there is more time for the four-step process, especially the research and evaluation components. All projects should be finished by April, for example, to leave a month for evaluation and making suggestions for the future.

For more suggestions for the future from the entire team of executive board members and project leaders, see the end of the “comm.UNITY Binder” in the appendices.

To make sure this student organization lasts beyond its first year, it is important to remember the Page Principles: “manage for tomorrow” and “realize

a company's true character is expressed by its people." The executive directors have spent the year mentoring the other leaders on the board to prepare them for taking over, not only with skills but also engraining the ideas of passion and dedication for the organization's mission and objectives. A binder has been created with all the instructions for how to run the organization and to help the transition period, even though many members will return. By actively recruiting standout members from different project teams, comm.UNITY hopes to create a strong executive board and team of project leaders to go forth into the next year.

Alliances must be maintained, clients must be recruited and relationships maintained. It is a lot to keep on top of, but comm.UNITY will go confidently into the future knowing that with a solid foundation, it will be easy to build a strong organization going into the future.

ENDNOTES

-
- ⁱ Philanthropy and Tobacco. 2001. Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada. 6 Mar. 2009 <<http://www.smoke-free.ca/filtertips03/philanthropy.htm>>.
- ⁱⁱ Hy, Lynn. "The Salvation Army - Doing the Most Good." Salvation Army Presentation. S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Room 101, Syracuse, NY. 27 Oct. 2008.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Baskin, Otis W. Public Relations: The Profession and the Practice. Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark, 1997. p. 5.
- ^{iv} Baskin, Otis W. Public Relations: The Profession and the Practice. Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark, 1997. p. 5.
- ^v Yarrington, Roger. Community Relations Handbook. New York: Longman, 1983. p. 229-230.
- ^{vi} Cutlip, Scott M., Allen H. Center, and Glen M. Broom. Effective Public Relations. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1985. p. 4.
- ^{vii} Ibid.
- ^{viii} Yarrington, Roger. Community Relations Handbook. New York: Longman, 1983. p. 10.
- ^{ix} Wragg, David. W. The Public Relations Handbook. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. p. 111
- ^x Cutlip, Scott M., Allen H. Center, and Glen M. Broom. Effective Public Relations. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1985. p. 199.
- ^{xi} Cutlip, Scott M., Allen H. Center, and Glen M. Broom. Effective Public Relations. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1985. p. 200.
- ^{xii} Ibid.
- ^{xiii} Stacks, Don W. Primer of Public Relations Research. New York: The Guilford Press, 2002. p. 3.
- ^{xiv} Stacks, Don W. Primer of Public Relations Research. New York: The Guilford Press, 2002. p. 13.
- ^{xv} Cutlip, Scott M., Allen H. Center, and Glen M. Broom. Effective Public Relations. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1985. p. 200.
- ^{xvi} Ibid.
- ^{xvii} Cutlip, Scott M., Allen H. Center, and Glen M. Broom. Effective Public Relations. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1985. p. 259.
- ^{xviii} Smith, Ronald D. Strategic Planning for Public Relations. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. p. 77-78.
- ^{xix} Baskin, Otis W. Public Relations The Profession and the Practice. Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark, 1997. p. 183.
- ^{xx} Kaufmann, Robert, and Cutler Cleveland. Environmental Science. New York: McGraw-Hill Science/Engineering/Math, 2007.
- ^{xxi} Cutlip, Scott M., Allen H. Center, and Glen M. Broom. Effective Public Relations. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1985. p. 188.

^{xxii} Javidi, Mitch., Michael L. Herman. "Change Management: A Systems Approach to Dealing with Organizational Chaos." Blackboard for PRL497. 5 Dec. 2009 <<http://blackboard.syr.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?>>.

^{xxiii} Ibid.

^{xxiv} Background and History. 2009. Arthur W. Page Society. 7 Feb. 2009 <<http://www.awpagesociety.com/site/about/background/>>.

^{xxv} Page Principles. 2009. Arthur W. Page Society. 7 Feb. 2009 <http://www.awpagesociety.com/site/about/page_principles/>.

^{xxvi} Ibid.

^{xxvii} Ibid.

^{xxviii} Ibid.

^{xxix} Ibid.

^{xxx} Ibid.

^{xxxi} Smith, Ronald D. Strategic Planning for Public Relations. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. p. 50.

^{xxxii} Smith, Ronald D. Strategic Planning for Public Relations. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. p. 30.

^{xxxiii} Smith, Ronald D. Strategic Planning for Public Relations. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. p. 42-43.

^{xxxiv} Smith, Ronald D. Strategic Planning for Public Relations. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. p. 46.

^{xxxvxxxv} Smith, Ronald D. Strategic Planning for Public Relations. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. p. 69.

^{xxxvi} Smith, Ronald D. Strategic Planning for Public Relations. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005.