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Spring 5-5-2015

### Orange Zest

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#### Recommended Citation

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

Candidate for Bachelor of   
and Renée Crown University Honors  
May 20

Honors Capstone Project in

Capstone Project Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_



Capstone Project Reader: \_\_\_\_\_

Honors Director: \_\_\_\_\_  
Stephen Kuusisto, Director

Date:



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## **Abstract**

Orange Zest is an entertainment news show, created for CitrusTV to be aired on Orange Television Network in Syracuse. It is completely student-run, written, produced and executed. CitrusTV is the only student-run news station on Syracuse University campus. Production takes place in the studio, in the Watson Theater building. Participating students range from freshman to seniors, in all majors and schools.

This show was created as the first entertainment news-show on campus. Students report on entertainment-based and cultural events on campus, in the city, and those which are relevant and newsworthy around the country.

Orange Zest began September 2014, and has had bi-monthly productions through April 2015. The show was piloting between October and December 2014, and was picked up by OTN and aired January through April 2015.

## **Executive Summary**

I have developed an entertainment-based news show for the student-run television station, CitrusTV. Orange Zest reports on cultural and entertainment news around the university, city and country. For example, “packages,” or pre-recorded news segments, have featured campus a capella concerts, holiday events, new local restaurants, and theater productions. “Readers,” are news the anchors read at the desk, are about upcoming local and campus events such as art shows, speakers, concerts and other culturally-relevant information.

Orange Zest also has a number of “correspondents,” “commentators” and ” “beat reporters.” Beat reporters focus on news of their specific topic. For example, health beat reporters discuss and demonstrate new exercise trends while fashion reporters give a report on what was seen on runways and red carpets. Commentators, reviewers and correspondents are able to give much more of an opinion in their segments. They both discuss news surrounding their topic as well as review its art, which is inherently subjective. Music reviewers discuss a specific album that has come out, or the performance of a concert. Television and movie reviewers both discuss the conversations and controversies surrounding new releases, but are also able to give their opinion as well. These are both local and national beats, so a movie reviewer will discuss box office trends in the Syracuse area, as well as their review of the film. Reviewers either talk straight at the camera, on screen alone, or discuss and answer questions with the anchors at the desk. One health correspondent even got the anchors in front of the desk to perform “trending exercises.” This brought a new element to the show and made it even more than a traditional “sitting newsroom.”

Since Orange Zest is not a hard news production, we are able to use a lighter tone at times and even play games. The games will relate to a specific newsworthy topic or be

moderated by one of the correspondents about their beat. For example, a movie reviewer who discussed Oscar films during award season then played a “name that quote” game with the anchors, where she read a quote and the anchors had to guess which film it was from. The anchors, who have phenomenal on-screen presence, make the segment come to life. Another example of a game is “Final Word” where a controversial soft news topic is introduced, and each anchor has 20 seconds to give their opinion. Viewers are then encouraged to tweet at the show using the hashtag #FinalWord, to say which anchor they agree with. This makes the show more interactive with the audience, something many professional newsrooms are striving to do. This game is a great way to tell deliver news to the audience and give a taste of the national conversation surrounding it. The quick pace of the game also makes it exciting and enticing.

Orange Zest is a significant contribution to Syracuse University campus and CitrusTV shows because it is the first and only entertainment news-style show. Newhouse attracts the best aspiring news producers and journalists around the world, and graduates some of the most successful media professionals. In classes, students learn about news production, but there is no better practice available on campus than the student-run news station, CitrusTV. The station has daily live newscasts, and many sports news shows. But there has been no outlet for aspiring Entertainment Reporters to learn their craft. Orange Zest is not a gossip rag. There is no speculation, or irrelevant or unconfirmed hearsay. Just as a hard news show would check all facts and sources, so does Orange Zest.

With growing popularity for similar shows such as E! News, Entertainment Tonight and Access Hollywood, many students are coming to Newhouse looking to pursue similar career paths. It was time for CitrusTV to offer a production for those students when I developed the program in September 2014.

I am happy to say since then, many aspiring entertainment reporting students have been able to practice and learn about this different type of reporting. The anchors, whom are both aspiring entertainment and human-interest reporters, have learned how to write for these types of shows, as well as speak unscripted and make a show fun and informative while being improvisational. Correspondents and beat reporters have practiced reporting newsworthy information, and writing editorially, while remaining fair and journalistic.

Everyone on camera has become much more natural, confident and possibly interesting for viewers to watch. As producers, we have learned how to organize a show to incorporate both local and national news. I have learned what translates well on screen, and what segments fall flat, and have tried to create more games and different types of ways of delivering the news to accommodate those findings. The producers have learned and practiced how to time unscripted segments, and work with talent to stay within time limits as much as possible. As a team, we have become more communicative before and during production, which will aid all of us in our post-graduation careers in professional newsrooms.

CitrusTV is a place to make mistakes before student become professionals. In creating Orange Zest, I have provided a space for students to practice, learn, and improve, all while learning and improving my news production abilities as well. In September when I first held the Orange Zest interest meeting, I had never been an executive producer of a show before. I held open forums with the group to discuss our visions for the show, and how we could execute them. The first episode on October 2 was very different than our most recent March episode, because we have been learning what works, what we like, and have challenged ourselves to produce better and more creative shows. It is my hope the show will continue for many years at Citrus after my graduation, and they continue to grow and adapt to the culture of the school.

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## **Acknowledgements**

Any television or film production is a team effort. I would like to thank my Honors Advisor, Prof. Hub Brown, as well as my Honors Reader, Prof. Christopher Tuohey, for their wisdom and guidance throughout this process. Thank you to the Orange Zest hosts, Cassie DiLaura and Jeff Kurkjian, as well as our dedicated production staff, Nicholas Papantonis, Claire Moran, Jackie Prager, Sarah Valenzuela, Nick Ross, Elani Ruddock, Allie Wahl, and Brittany Muller.

## **Advice to Future Honors Students**

My advice to future honors students is to pick a project or topic you are extremely interested in and dedicated to. You will put so much time and effort into this project, that it should reflect a passion. Also, create or explore something which is worthwhile to you. While this is a chance to show off your intelligence and creativity, it is also an opportunity to grow and learn, and even fail at something.



## **Reflective Essay**

### I. Conception

Creating Orange Zest has been an extremely rewarding Honors Capstone project. I joined CitrusTV, the student-run station on campus, as a freshman to learn more about news production than I was being taught in the classroom at that point. Although I am a Broadcast & Digital Journalism student, the BDJ curriculum does not teach television reporting until junior year, nor television production until senior year. It is for this reason that I, as well as many of my peers, dedicate so much time to Citrus: to get a head start on our TV news education before we are halfway through college.

Over my four years with CitrusTV, I worked on the daily 6pm newscasts as a content producer, reporter and anchor. I ran studio positions, such as camera and teleprompter, and learned about various technical positions in the control room.

BDJ students in Newhouse are most commonly interested in news or sports reporting or production. Both Citrus and Newhouse are accommodating to these aspirations. Citrus has daily news shows with news and sports reporters, as well as weekly sports shows, and a weekly political commentary show. Newhouse allows for students to report on news and sports stories, as well as offering Political Reporting and Sport Reporting classes.

However, I have found a growing population of BDJ students interested in entertainment reporting. Many more are graduating Newhouse with the objective of reporting on music, television, fashion and film. I have never aspired to be an entertainment reporter, but I have always enjoyed watching entertainment news, such as E News, Access Hollywood, Entertainment Tonight, and entertainment segments of local news.

Thus I ventured to create a new opportunity for students to learn entertainment news production by creating Orange Zest for CitrusTV. This was a terrifying journey because I had never executive produced my own show before, let alone a pilot.

The first step was assembling a team. At the CitrusTV General Interest Meeting in September 2014, I explained my idea, and gathered a group of interested individuals. Next, was establishing a vision. At our first meeting, the group of about fifteen interested students discussed what we wanted to do for Orange Zest, what we wanted the show to look like and incorporate, and how we would go about doing it. I delegated positions and duties for our first show, and we created an outline of what segments it would have.

Students were most interested in reporting on the cultural news that they were specifically passionate about. One student loves concerts and music: she would go to a concert at the Westcott that weekend, and even though she could not bring a camera in, would report on the performance. She would research the artists' past performances and albums, and give her review on how the show went in comparison.

Another student was interested in celebrity news. This was tricky for me, because I did not want Orange Zest to be a gossip show. We decided to make this student the "Social Media Reporter." She would report on what's "trending" online, what people are talking and tweeting about, and what celebrity information is circulating. I was adamant about reporting facts, so anything she discussed regarding celebrities had to be verified by the individual. This means she would be able to say what a celebrity has publically announced, but not re-report what magazines have "heard," "speculated," or found out from an anonymous source.

We would also have student-produced packages regarding campus and local events. A student would go to a campus a-cappella concert, record songs and interviews and audience

reactions. Another student would go to a Latin America cultural event, with food, music and dances. She would film what happened there, interview those involved and who attended, and could even answer questions with anchors on air after the show.

Overall, we enthusiastically went into the first episode.

## II. Learning to be a producer

In September 2014, I had been a reporter for CitrusTV since the beginning of my freshman year, I had reported for classes, and I had even just finished reporting for WETM-TV in Washington, D.C. with the Newhouse Master's Capstone, of which I was the only undergraduate. However I had never been a producer of any show. My production skills were limited to what I had learned while watching producers for CitrusTV News and in summer internships.

In producing Orange Zest, I have learned a great deal about television news production, leadership and organizing a team. My first challenge was delegating positions. I would not be able to create an entire thirty-minute program myself, so I would have to have writers, reporters and videographers.

My next challenge was coming up with a flow for the show. News shows are best when there is a path that the audience can follow. We begin with headlines, to give the audience a preview of what they can expect, and then the Top Story. I wanted the top story to always be campus-related, since that is what makes Orange Zest unique. Viewers can get national news online or other shows, but Orange Zest is special in that it is a unique service for students to see what is directly happening at their school.

My aim with the flow from there was to have smooth, coherent transitions. After the top story we would go into campus news, and from there, local Syracuse-city news, going into New York news and finally national headlines.

It was tricky to find spaces in the show for commentators and correspondents. I wanted on-air guests to break up straight news stories, but that did not always accommodate the flow I was aiming for. Placing segments throughout the show was a balancing act, and each time was discretionary. There was no clear format, but with transitions, I tried to make the show as smooth and natural as possible.

Timing was probably my biggest challenge in learning to be a news producer. We used the computer program ENPS to create a “rundown” which is the list of each segment, with script, images, camera shots, and an estimate of how long each segment will take. The computer program then counts backwards from the thirty-minute allotment to tell the producer how much time is left in the show. In an ideal world, the show ends in exactly thirty minutes. In typical news shows, if a show is “light,” and there is time left over, the camera will show credits with shots of the anchors “chatting.” If the show is “heavy” the producer must cut segments in order to finish on time. Running over thirty minutes is not an option because the station needs to start its next show.

A big challenge in timing *Orange Zest* is that much of it is not scripted. With reviewers and commentators, the hosts ask questions, and the length of the responses varies. As the show went on and we incorporated more games, which I will discuss later in this reflection, those games were unscripted and could have taken up a wide range of time.

After the first few episodes I found that I was completely underestimating how much time each segment needed, and in order to allow the show to have a consistent flow and good

energy, I needed to leave more time for conversation and improvisation. For the first show, I left about thirty seconds of “wiggle room.” By the last show, I left about three minutes. Those three minutes however were used up, as on-air talent became more comfortable talking and letting their personalities shine on camera.

Communication was key with timing. Before the show, I asked all reviewers and correspondents to time their segments, and tell me how much they would need. Yet this was not always sufficient, which was why we needed very fluid communication during recordings as well. The two hosts had IFB’s in their ears, which allow me to talk directly to them from the control room. There is also a floor director, whom I could communicate with via walkie-talkie. She was able to give everyone in the studio direction from the control room, so we were all aware of timing, when we needed to move onto the next segment, and if we had the luxury to continue with what we were on. As the show progressed throughout the year, practicing these communication skills saved our productions.

Creating Orange Zest has also challenged my leadership skills. I became responsible for a thirty-minute show, which meant I was responsible for what each student contributed. We recorded every other Monday, and on our off Mondays had production meetings to plan. I needed to organize and delegate each person’s role on set and in pre-production, as well as the stories they would contribute.

It was my job to inspire the staff to contribute. I needed to make each person feel responsible for their stories so they follow through with what they had committed to. This is one reason why I think Orange Zest was so successful, because there were so many contributors that each person felt important, and thus became dedicated to their role. No one felt like the show would be able to work without his or her contributions, and on the few occasions people were not



able to come to a shoot, they would find a replacement for their role. This is also why I believe the show will continue running after my graduation.

I learned a big lesson in running a news show when one of my reviewers accidentally put an explicative on the screen. She was showing a celebrity tweet, and a word unacceptable by the FCC was included. Luckily, the show is not taped live, and we were able to bleep it out in post-production. However, I felt responsible that I did not properly check it over before filming, and have learned the necessity of double checking everything that is supposed to air, and making sure all on-air talent knows the rules and regulations.

### III. Elements of the show

Orange Zest has changed drastically from episode one in October, to the final episode in April. The first episode was stiff, choppy and did not show the personality of the staff. The writing was very formal, and as the show developed, we became more informal and creative in our writing. You would not write a story about a bank robbery the same as you would about a dance recital, and throughout episodes I learned this. Many of the segments on the show also changed throughout the year, and we were able to incorporate many more.

#### *a. TV Reviews*

Our TV Reviewer, Jaclyn Prager, started out reading her stories from the teleprompter on a one-shot (so it was just her in the camera shot). The anchors would introduce her, she would read about what shows were premiering, which received good reviews, and which she recommends. After a minute and a half of her report, it would go back to the anchors who would thank her and move on.

This model was quite stiff and boring. We decided to switch to a question-and-answer segment. Jaclyn sat at the anchor desk, and would begin to explain one of her stories. Before the show she would tell the anchors when to ask her specific questions. They would feed her the question, and she would answer, unscripted, with only notes. This came out very well. It was conversational and more relaxed, and while it was more difficult to time, it felt more engaging for the audience.

*b. Health segment*

The Health segment was relatively new to the show, and was only on the last three episodes. We wanted to move anchors away from the desk, and so our health reporter would demonstrate trending exercises. She would explain why a certain exercise was making news that week (if it had recently been endorsed by an athlete, etc) and the three would do the workout together.

One week, while Michelle Obama was endorsing her “Gimme Five” campaign, to show off five ways people have made healthier choices, our health correspondent, Sarah Valenzuela, explained the campaign and then demonstrated five new workouts with the anchors. This was a prime example as to how we incorporated health news (Obama’s campaign) with on-air interaction between talent, which was also entertaining to watch.

*c. Twitter game*

Cheyenne De’Von joined Orange Zest wanting to focus on Hollywood news. However, we were at odds because it was not my vision to have celebrity gossip on the show. As a result, we created the Twitter Game. Cheyenne would read a tweet, and the two hosts had to compete to guess which celebrity said it. My stipulation with this game was that the Tweets had to be related to a larger story. There had to be a purpose for it, whether it was an actress endorsing her

new movie coming out, or an artists upset about the outcome of the Grammy awards. Then, after the author of the quote was announced, Cheyenne would explain the context and further develop the story behind the Tweet.

I found this to be an entertaining way to break up the straight news shots. With this game, the show developed from a news show about entertainment stories, to a lighter and more fun show. It may have made Orange Zest begin to stray from my original vision, but just as ESPN breaks up its coverage of sports with lighter stories, writing, games and banter, so does Orange Zest. The nature of the subject allows the show to be more playful.

*d. Final Word*

Once we incorporated the Twitter Game, feedback from the crew was overwhelmingly positive. Everyone who worked on the show loved the game and what it brought to the tone of Orange Zest. They then began to brainstorm new game ideas, and one that was successful was “Final Word.” The writers for the show come up with a list of about five entertainment news topics that are somehow controversial. The hosts then have fifteen seconds each to give their “final words” on the topic before they are cut off. Viewers are encouraged to tweet in which host was the “winner” with the hash-tag “Final Word.”

All professional news media outlets are currently looking for ways to involve their audiences on social media more. It is the direction in which all programs are going, and so I wanted Orange Zest to be a multi-faceted platform as well. WBNG, the station I work for, shows viewer photography that has been tweeted in. The Today Show has an “orange room” where they answer viewer tweets and messages. While this may be a controversial practice in itself for news shows, it is the reality of the present-day industry.

Final Word was wildly successful in the frequent critique-sessions I held with the cast and crew, and we continued to bring it back each show.

#### IV. Reviews

In order to continue improving Orange Zest throughout the year, after each episode I held a “brainstorming session.” Cast and crew would watch the most recent episode, and discuss what worked and what we should change. Since I was starting a show from scratch, we were faced with the task of finding its voice. These brainstorms allowed us to work collaboratively to think of innovate ways to improve the show and develop it into a product we were proud of and excited about.

After the first semester of Orange Zest, I continued to have brainstorming sessions with cast and crew, but I also had separate critique sessions with impartial viewers. Non-involved audiences would watch episodes and tell me their opinions on performance, writing, flow, visual appeal and tone. This helped me see the product with a cleaner eye, since those critiques came from people that did not know our intention nor the work that had gone into production.

I learned the importance of audience feedback in this practice because I saw how dramatically the show improved with it. In my future endeavors I will continue to seek critique in my work from both involved and impartial audiences.

#### V. The future of Orange Zest

The purpose of Orange Zest was to start a show for Citrus that benefits its members. Since I am a graduating senior, when it became apparent the underclassmen would want to continue with it next year, I realized I had to start training a younger student to take over. The show’s director, Nick Papantonis, is a sophomore that had been dedicated from its beginnings.

He immediately expressed interest in producing next year. Nick helped me create graphics for the show, reported for each episode, and helped me organize during pre and post production.

My hope for the future direction of Orange Zest is that it continues to be a show that teaches broadcast students proper entertainment reporting. Since it is a growing market, students who aspire to work in that type of niche journalism deserve to practice their writing and reporting skills and on-air presence. I also hope Orange Zest teaches students how to report entertainment without gossiping. I believe there is integrity in entertainment reporting if done correctly, and I want Orange Zest to continue to be the space in which students may practice and learn how to do this.

**Links to Orange Zest**

April 13, 2015: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pj-I6\\_ejMKM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pj-I6_ejMKM)

March 31, 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2o9Nruo7vc>

February 16, 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2Ralgwuujc>

February 2, 2015: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Xo7U\\_aQwGQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Xo7U_aQwGQ)

November 19, 2014: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGpCQ1j\\_nHw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGpCQ1j_nHw)