

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

[Home](#) » [News](#) » Local agencies select PR teams' plans »

Local agencies select PR teams' plans

Sarah Brubeck | Dec. 12, 2007

Twenty-five students got a taste of what's it's like to work for competing public relation agencies this fall during their J428 PR Planning and Research course.

During the semester, the students worked in six teams to create communication strategies for one of two area nonprofit organizations. At the end of the semester, the leaders of the nonprofits selected teams that had developed the best strategies.

"It's all about bringing the real world into the classroom," said Ralph Winslow Visiting Professor Jim Bright. "In the real world, PR agencies compete with real competitors for the business. They develop creative communication strategies and campaigns that address the real needs of real clients, and the best team wins. That's what we do here."

Three groups competed to develop the best strategy for Boys and Girls Clubs of Bloomington while another three groups worked for Girls Inc. of Indianapolis.

Girls Inc. gave each group a packet of background information and assigned each agency a target audience: parents, girls or volunteers.

"The primary thing we looked for was relevance," said Pat Wachtel, president and chief executive officer for Girls Inc. "We wanted good ideas that we can implement."

ELMS (named for the first initial of each team member's first name), the winning group for Girls Inc., focused on girls ages 6-18. Team members went to Indianapolis for a day and talked to middle school and high school girls to ask them what makes something cool. The winning team created "Strong, Smart and Bold" t-shirts that reflect the organization's motto.

"We wanted to come up with something special to instill pride in these girls," said Lindsey Wise, account executive for ELMS. "We all felt part of the Girls Inc. team."

Girls Inc. plans to implement several of the student teams' ideas, including the t-shirt idea and the idea to create a Facebook group.

"Students showed a lot of passion for Girls Inc.," Wachtel said. "They were excited about what they're doing and that feeling is contagious."

Other members of the winning Girls Inc. team are Elise Schreiber, Megan Melcic and Sara Holtz.

Three other student PR agencies worked with Boys and Girls Clubs executive director Jeff Baldwin, who asked the groups to help his organization set up an alumni association and to find ways to increase parental involvement in the organization.

"It was critical that the winning team understand the challenges facing us," Baldwin said. "To do this, the groups had to do a lot of research. The winning team's ground work was very well established."

The winning team, Canvas Presse, focused on research. Members handed out 500 surveys at the Indiana Memorial Union and at grocery stores to see if students and local citizens know about the club. They also interviewed experts throughout the community and conducted a media audit that analyzed news reports about the club.

"We met with Jeff right off the bat," said Kevin Caldwell, account executive for Canvas Presse. "That's one thing we did that the other teams didn't. We tackled (the project) from all angles."

Team members spent about 10 hours a week each working on their plan and met for one hour each week to discuss their plan.

"We had to change our plan several times," Caldwell said. "The executive director suggested that we go one way but, in some cases, our research showed we needed to do something else "first."



Photo by Crista Chapman

Team members (from left) Jennifer Smith, Cristy Grant and Katie Murphy presented their strategies to Boys and Girls Club director Jeff Baldwin (foreground).

Related

[CLASS TRAINING NEW CROP OF VIDEO STORYTELLERS](#) (NOV. 19)

[PRACTICUM SETS UP AD, PR AGENCY](#) (NOV. 18)



Photo by Crista Chapman

Katie Murphy explains the strategy proposal during her team's presentation to the Boys and Girls Club director.

Besides taking on these projects, the students had two exams, outside reading and lectures from guest speakers.

"(The students) worked with us as if we were a client," said Baldwin. "They met with us, shook our hands, said thank you and sent follow up e-mails. They did the real digging and came up with a real plan that we can execute."

The Boys and Girls Club plans to use a lot of Canvas Presse's research. The team created orientation packets for new board members and shared ideas on how to boost community involvement.

"It was a contest with a winner and losers," said Baldwin. "That's so real world. I could have come in and said you are all winners today, but that isn't reality. Competing to win is just part of life."

Other members of the winning Boys and Girls Clubs team are Leah Linder, Lindsey Lucenta, Katie Tasker and Chris Werner.

[PRINT](#) [E-MAIL THIS PAGE](#) [BACK TO NEWS](#)

This entry was posted on Wednesday, Dec 12, 2007 at 5:20 pm and is filed under [News](#). You can [trackback](#) from your own site.