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Course engages students as PR consultants

The World Computer Exchange (WCE) has a sophisticated public relations plan that includes pitch letters, press releases, electronic newsletter, social media initiatives, and an elevator pitch.

The comprehensive plan emerged from a partnership between the Boston-area nonprofit and undergraduates enrolled in the Bentley course Public Relations Writing. Taught **by Jon Boroshok**, adjunct professor of information design and corporate communication, the course offers hands-on experience in all facets of public relations.

Strong Portfolio

“For many students, this is the first real introduction to public relations,” explains Boroshok, a six-year member of the Bentley faculty and president of PR firm TechMarcom. “The goal is for them not only to gain exposure to the field, but to come away with a strong portfolio of work to use in obtaining internships and full-time jobs.”

Building that professional expertise begins right away, when students hear from several local organizations during a panel discussion on public relations in the not-for-profit world. Working in three- to five-person teams, course participants select an organization with which to collaborate for the semester (“it’s ‘Nonprofit Idol,’” quips Boroshok).

The students’ charge: Develop marketing communication materials that support a strategic direction for the nonprofits. Guidance includes how to create awareness and gain media coverage, shape public opinion, recruit volunteers, and bring in donations.

Dynamic Leadership

Katelyn Hoover '10 was a member of the three-person team for WCE, a 10-year-old organization that donates unwanted computers to youth in more than 70 developing countries.

“The World Computer Exchange had a really dynamic leader, which made my team excited to work with the organization,” says Hoover, an Information Design and Corporate Communication major who also completed a Liberal Studies concentration in Global Perspectives. “It was an organization I could see myself volunteering for.”

Next up was a session in the Bentley Library, where students learned about the resources available for researching the target audience of their respective nonprofits. In the classroom, fictitious clients provided an opportunity to master the basics of crafting a pitch letter, developing a social media strategy, and other important initiatives — lessons they then applied to their real-world assignments.

“With the nonprofits, we were able to test-drive what we learned in the classroom,” says Hoover. “For example, we learned about how to write a successful press release, then actually created one for our organization.”

At the end of the semester, the nonprofit representatives returned to campus for a formal presentation by the teams. Students shared their findings and recommendations, and provided a comprehensive public relations plan that encompassed specific strategies and supporting materials.

For example, Hoover and fellow students on the WCE team delivered a 53-page report complete with a competitive analysis, research findings about the target audiences, an outline of key messages, and suggestions for special events and awards that could help boost public awareness of the organization.

“The nonprofits are able to get needed consulting services, while the students gain real-world experience,” says Boroshok. “It’s a win-win.”

Kudos Where Due

The win extended to Boroshok himself, who received the 2009 Bentley Curricular Service–Learning Faculty Award. The annual honor recognizes professors who integrate service–learning projects into courses.

“The students are the people who deserve the pat on the back for this award,” he says. “They are actually doing the work with the nonprofits. It speaks volumes about the caliber of students at Bentley.”

Hally Pinaud '08 was among those who nominated Boroshok for the award.

“Writing for business is its own art, and Professor Boroshok was the first professor who taught me how to do that,” says Pinaud, who earned a BS in Marketing and joined the

Princeton Review in Atlanta, as a marketing manager. “His class gave me an understanding of the intricacies of public relations and how it relates to my own role in marketing. He was absolutely one of the best professors I had at Bentley.”

Regina Ryan, director of strategic partnerships for the WCE, gives similar high marks to the collaboration with Boroshok’s class.

“The Bentley student team was extraordinary,” she says. “They’re willing to take risks, which isn’t something you see very often. It was clear that they truly cared about our work — and that made all the difference in the world.”

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