

REFLECTION PIECE

My goal for this project was to create a detailed and thorough event plan for Professor Mariam Breant to use as a guide and a reference in order to execute a large-scale fundraising gala. The plan was made to ultimately be a way for Professor Breant to raise funds for her newly created not-for-profit organization. The finished, hard copy of my capstone, however, was not my only goal. I wanted the process to involve all the skills and techniques I learned through of my studies in marketing and public communication at American University, as well as my internship experiences in both the PR and event planning fields.

Through my completion of this project, I can proudly say that I think I have done just that. The plan was multi-faceted, and in order to be successful, needed aspects from all three realms of study (public communication, marketing, and event planning.) Taking a management role in Professor Stack's Public Relations Case Studies Class was a new experience for me, but I think the organization of the project and delegation of various aspects ended up working very well. Most of the students were as excited as I was about the finished project. After presenting to the extremely thankful Professor Breant, I don't think there was a student in the room who did not feel accomplished.

The steps taken to create this capstone spanned over the entire spring semester. In early January, Professor Stack and I met to discuss our ideas and outlined a rough timeline. By the middle of January, the requirements and outline

became more concrete. Professor Breant spoke with Professor Stack's class to describe her personal background, visions for the organization, and advice for planning the event. Her story was extremely touching and it was inspiring to see how emotionally connected she was to this project and her organization.

In early February Jessica Griffin, a representative from the Capital Area Food Bank came to speak about her experiences with the food bank, the organization's current programs, and her opinions regarding the project. After the two speakers, the class and I were able to brainstorm about specific ideas more easily. To further our knowledge about the entities involved in the event, the month of February was designated to research. The class was split up into three research teams – Mariam Breant, Centre International pour L'enfant and La Mere, and the Capital Area Food Bank. I checked in with the different groups periodically, and outlined the key things they should look for. The teams did very well, and through their research I was able to compile a document of *key findings* for all three research subjects.

After a few meetings with Professor Stack in March, we decided who and how to break up the class for the remainder of the project. The class was broken into six groups in order to cover the many areas of the event plan. These areas were venue, production, partnerships, print, radio, and online. Through our meetings we also discussed the progress of the project, the individual work ethics of the students, and how each of us saw this coming together as a final product.

By April, the class and I had concluded a very important brainstorming session for what was needed from each team. Instead of breaking the students up into teams right away, I wanted each student to be able to contribute his or her opinions to the elements they felt were necessary in the final event plan. For example, even though one student was on the venue team I wanted him to be able to voice his opinion on what the print team should be producing in order to make this project successful. The brainstorming session went very well, and as a group we decided on this as an explanation of the project:

Mariam Breant of Centre International pour L'enfant et La Mere, or C.I.E.M. is partnering with the Capital Area Food Bank to present a fundraising event, Performing for the Future. The event will be hosted by Breant and will consist of musical performances by local children's groups as well as other young singers and performers in the area. The event will also consist of a live performance by Breant. Breant, a highly recognized singer on the Ivory Coast, has always had a passion for music and children. She created C.I.E.M. to raise awareness and increase aid to Seguela's hospital, which is in extremely poor condition and has a very large number of child patients. She has partnered with the Capital Area Food Bank, another local organization that has a strong interest in keeping all children healthy. The Food Bank not only provides food for those who need it, but also educates the D.C. area about hunger and nutrition. Together, the two organizations strive to help children in need and provide a healthy and safe environment for them to live in.

Through Performing for the Future, local child performers will be showcased and attendees will have a chance to learn more about one of D.C.'s newest not-for-profit's, C.I.E.M., and become involved. All proceeds from ticket sales and donations will directly benefit C.I.E.M. and the Capital Area Food Bank. All are invited to attend.

The name was chosen through a compilation of various ideas and then the class took a final vote. The goal of the title was to fit C.I.E.M and the Capital Food Bank together in a way that the public could relate to.

Through April I worked with each group to make sure they were staying on task and completing the different aspects of their assignments. Most groups worked well together and had kept lines of communication open with me. Two weeks after our first brainstorm, the class and I had an open discussion about everyone's progress. We also discussed any weaknesses or obstacles that anyone was coming across. During this time, each group brought rough drafts of their materials to discuss with me and presented them to the rest of the class. This meeting helped everyone stay on track and also enabled the different groups' projects to remain cohesive.

All documents and write-ups were due to me before April 24th. I edited and made changes as needed to all of the student work. I also formatted the documents I received to make them cohesive and aesthetically pleasing. I created a powerpoint presentation in order for us to present our final project to Professor Breant on April 28th. All students were given a copy of the presentation by the 24th, and we used that day to finalize what each group was going to say and present. On the 28th, we presented Professor Breant with all of the hard copy material we had produced as well as our final presentation to explain the reasoning and thought processes behind all of the work.

The presentation was a great success. Professor Breant was extremely pleased with the final product and seemed very excited about making the event a

reality. All of the teams presented well and seemed well prepared to answer any of her questions.

I am extremely pleased with the finished product of my Honors Capstone. I used my skills from my public communication background to assist with the press release, media advisory, fact sheet, and media list. That background also helped me advise the class on which publics to target and how to really involve the community. My marketing background helped me to assist with the design and visual parts of the project, as well as the creative aspects. I brought my knowledge of the event-planning field into many parts of the project, especially when thinking logistically about venue choices and making sure the entire event was cohesive.

I enjoyed being able to create a project that is extremely practical for the real world. With all of the information that we gave to professor Breant, I strongly believe that she could have great success in executing this event. The plan would save her large amounts of time, energy, and stress. Starting a not-for-profit organization is a huge project to take on in itself. A fundraising event could not only help her raise awareness, but I think it would be a great way to boost morale and meet many other people who share her passion for children.

My Honors Capstone has been a success on many levels. I created a project that represents the culmination of my studies at American University and my real-life experiences through internships. I have acquired experience in a management position and furthered my knowledge of working on one project with many other people. And last, but certainly not least, I have hopefully, through this

event, helped a not-for-profit organization with a great potential to make a difference in many children's lives grow in numbers, strengthen in spirit, and flourish in resources.