

## Reflection Essay



This semester I had the opportunity to work with the Fill Your Bucket List Foundation as part of the APPLES Service-Learning Program. This program is a component of the “Public Relations Writing” course in the School of Media and Journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The goal of this program is to provide public relations communication pieces that the client can use to meet their needs. Our group of six students was divided into two teams as requested by the client. One team was responsible for communications that included emails, social media posts and Facebook content. The second team, of which I was a member, was responsible for PR such as press releases and media outreach. The work for both teams was centered on the Fill Your Bucket List Foundation’s main fundraiser, the Bucket Bash, which was held in March.

This assignment helped me to learn what it was like to work with a real client, and to provide them with useful written public relations materials. I gained hands-on experience and was able to apply what I learned in the classroom to the real world. Some of the public relations pieces I generated for my client included a print news release, a feature pitch, a speech, a revised boiler plate and an about us page.

One of the highlights of this experience for me was participating in the Bucket Bash that we had been promoting. Fill Your Bucket List Foundation is a nonprofit organization that grants wishes for adult cancer patients in North Carolina. The funding to achieve this is obtained through donations and their annual fundraiser, the Bucket Bash. The Bucket Bash is an evening event filled with fine food, dancing, and auctions. I volunteered that evening at the Kendra Scott table. The positive response in attendance and donations made me realize the value of public relations.

The ability to produce PR material based on the time preferences of the client along with my own academic workload and deadlines could be challenging at times. Balancing all the tasks involved provided a valuable lesson in time management and prioritizing that will benefit me in future endeavors. It was also challenging to think of new ideas and new ways to say things regarding the Fill Your Bucket List Foundation and the Bucket Bash. It forced me to think outside the box and to create PR materials without a prompt or template to guide me. Working as a team took added coordination in making sure we were all on the same page. The various schedules of the client, other students, and myself often times made it difficult to meet or talk. The foundation does not have a building in which to meet in order to discuss ideas, review previous PR materials, or preview any

new written work. Fortunately, we were able to meet our communication needs with each other by email, text, and Google Docs.

I would recommend the foundation keep generating content for print and broadcast news releases, for its website, and on social media. It is important to expand its online presence and to update its information frequently or on a scheduled timeframe. As a nonprofit, Fill Your Bucket List Foundation relies on donations to accomplish its mission. It is therefore important that it reaches its target audience.

I would also recommend Fill Your Bucket List Foundation be assigned to students during the fall semester because this is when most of the PR for the Bucket Bash is generated. I feel that there wasn't much work for us to do during the spring semester. It may be that the client doesn't need six interns split into two teams, but rather three interns to handle all of their PR and social media needs. There are a lot of other things the foundation can have interns do, such as event planning, contacting sponsors, media advisories, and creating or updating media kits. There were weeks with no communication from the client. There was also no feedback on the work we produced as to whether it was acceptable or used by the foundation. I think it would be beneficial to have biweekly meetings either in person or by an internet chat.

Fill Your Bucket List Foundation is a great organization to work with. Marie Otto, Executive Director, is very helpful in coordinating communication needs and demands. She is very nice and very passionate about her job. Marie is very receptive to suggestions and was understanding of our needs as students. She was always appreciative of our efforts and the work we produced. Working with her and the Fill Your Bucket List Foundation gave me an increased perspective of the job responsibilities of a PR professional and an appreciation for the role of public relations in the nonprofit sector. I feel better prepared to work in public relations and more confident in creating quality PR material that clients will find useful.

By producing public relations material for Fill Your Bucket List Foundation and thoroughly assessing and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of their communication, I was better able to understand the obstacles many companies face, particularly when it comes to nonprofit organizations. It was rewarding to be able to provide my client with useful PR materials that further their communication needs and help them receive the desired publicity for their organization and their fundraising event. The success of this year's Bucket Bash, which surpassed their fundraising goal by over \$10,000, demonstrated to all of us how quality and timely PR can benefit an organization in need of assistance.

Working with the Fill Your Bucket List Foundation has been a rewarding and valuable experience and has contributed to my education in public relations.