Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects   Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects

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Syracuse Grows: Grassroots Communications

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ABSTRACT

Syracuse Grows: Grassroots Communication

Small budgets, overextended staff, and inaccessibility of design software can prevent non-profit organizations from having successful communications. This project is an examination of sustainable communications through creating a marketing system for Syracuse Grows, a grassroots network cultivating a just foodscape in the city of Syracuse. The goal was to provide a successful communications program for Syracuse Grows that represented their needs, reflected graphic principles, and promoted the organization. But more importantly, this plan was designed so that it can be updated and utilized following the completion of this project.

The five requirements for this plan were: (1) to develop a coherent brand identity (including a logo, stationery set, and mailers); (2) to develop efficient communication within the group through listservs and a blog; (3) to develop a Web site that features upcoming events, community partners, photographs, grants, and maps of the gardens; (4) to create a template for future posters and advertising campaigns; and (5) and to create a template for a reoccurring newsletter.

This project was also a study of utility. Each component was designed with a consideration for how it was to be used in the future. Communication pieces needed to be edited without a design program and utilize standard typefaces. The Web site needed to include a content management system.

Community organizations have limited resources. We were able to tackle that problem by using the most up-to-date and free solutions available. By taking advantage of the resources provided by Joomla! and Google, we were able to keep the communication plan of Syracuse Grows current and more importantly: sustainable. The largest benefit of this project is that Syracuse Grows now has an entire system that can be updated continually in the future while still retaining the brand identity of the organization. The continuity of their marketing materials (including the Web site, www.syracusegrows.org) will help them to be a unified and recognizable resource in Syracuse.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION

To my grandmother, for always being proud of me and never ceasing to tell me so. I love you.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Psalm 107:1

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Gregory Hedges, without whom this project would not have been possible. Thank you for your commitment to your students, for your dedication to teaching, and for helping me read miles and miles of scripting language.

To Jonnell Allen and Elizabeth Slate, thank you for giving me this opporunity, for working with me along the way, and for teaching me the importance of local food. And to Frank Raymond Cetera, for your assistance with form coding and paypal.

To Syracuse Grows, thank you all for trusting me to make this happen.

To Eric Holzwarth and the Renee Crown Honors Program, the Visual & Interactive Communications Department, and the Geography department at Syracuse University, thank you for your support over the past four years.

To Robert and Sally Marshall, thank you for everything.

To Dwayne Pragg, thank you for your unfailing love.

To Carissa Matthews, thank you for your wonderful friendship, for always having more faith in me than I do myself, for your sincere honesty, and for listening (you are better at it than you think).

To Lisa Berry and Amanda Thompson, thank you for living with me.

And, to the creators of open and closed source software: Joomla!, Adobe Creative Suite, Microsoft Office, Google, GoDaddy, MAMP, JCE, Chrono Engine, and Expose 4. Without your work, my work could not exsist.

ADVICE TO FUTURE HONORS STUDENTS

Pick a project you are passionate about, because you will be spending a lot of time on it. Make extra checkpoints along the way, because it is never too late to learn time management. Know your resources, you have access to amazing knowledge and exceptional professors at this university. Most of all, have fun.

REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Scope

The Honors Capstone project represents the culmination of my undergraduate studies at Syracuse University. As a graphic arts and geography dual major I am interested in the importance of effective communication, the geographical implications of what we communicate about, and the way we talk about geography. When I was choosing a focus for this capstone project, I looked for something that would bridge my two fields of study. In October of my senior year, I approached Jonnell Allen, the Syracuse University community geographer, in search of a project that would assist a community group in the form of scholarship in action. Jonnell told me about Syracuse Grows, a grassroots network cultivating a just foodscape in the City of Syracuse, and she suggested that I create a communications plan for them. Immediately, I was excited about the chance to assist a community group with their commincation needs because working with nonprofit organizations is one of my passions.

Throughout my schooling I developed a passion for volunteering with nonprofit organizations. I am one of the founding members of comm.UNITY, a student organization committed to connecting students interested in various fields of communications with local nonprofit community organizations that need help to create sustainable communications plans. Through my work with comm.UNITY I have worked with local nonprofits and witnessed the difficulties that these organizations face in creating marketing tools. Small budgets, overextended staff, and inaccessibility of design software can prevent these

organizations from having successful communications. When volunteers create marketing materials as needed, nonprofits may end up with a hodgepodge of materials and no clear brand identity. This capstone project was an opportunity to explore the requirements and restrictions of a grassroots communication plan.

A communication plan consists of all the materials needed to market and represent an organization. I describe the plan as "grassroots" because it is for a group that formed on a local level, for a local initiative and is made up entirely of volunteers. Typically, grassroots organizations have even less resources than a registered nonprofit organization and they depend on volunteers, donations, and grant money in order to function. As a result, these organizations are also restricted in resources for public realtions. The goal of my project was to provide a successful communications plan for Syracuse Grows that represented their needs, reflected graphic design principles, and promoted the organization. But more importantly, the plan was designed so that it could be updated and utilized following the completion of this project.

In order to provide a successful system for Syracuse Grows, I first had to determine the required content. Throughout the course of this project I consulted with two members of Syracuse Grows: Jonnell Allen, and Elizabeth Slate, the founder of The Alchemical Nursery Project. Together, we established five requirements for their communications plan: (1) to develop a coherent brand identity (including a logo, stationery set, and mailer); (2) to develop efficient communication within the group through listservs and a blog; (3) to develop a Web site that features upcoming events, community partners, photographs, grants,

and maps of the gardens; (4) to create a template for future posters and advertising campaigns; and (5) and to create a template for a reoccurring newsletter.

Each aspect of this plan had restrictions and obstacles to overcome. The most important restriction was a concern over utility. Each component was designed with a consideration for how it was to be used, accessed, and edited in the future. Most designers are in charge of their end-product from sketching to production. We design a letterhead or poster in Adobe InDesign and then send it to the printer and await the results. However, InDesign is a proprietary program that does not come standard on the average computer, and I will not be here to create all future posters for Syracuse Grows. Therefore, I had to design a product for my client that could by used repeatedly and edited in a software that is accessible to many users across the most platforms. By creating an easy-to-use template in Microsoft Word, the client is given a tool with longevity that also promotes continuity of their brand identity.

I was also limited in my choice of typefaces, because all print materials had to be editable. I could only choose fonts that came standard on most computers, were free online, or had affordable licensing fees. This restricted my choices from the thousands of typefaces accessible in the university graphics lab to the approximately 50 typefaces available on both Windows and Apple operating systems. Moreover, in order to allow for continuity among marketing materials, I also chose a typeface that is compatible with HTML Web coding.

Along with these design restrictions, I also needed to quickly learn additional skills in order to successfully accomplish the goals of this project. I

developed a Web site that could be updated without requiring an understanding of scripting languages. A site like that requires a content management system(CMS), which uses an online database to store information in relevant categories, and an administrative "back end" where the web editor can upload paragraphs, pictures, or documents into those categories. To accomplish this portion of the project, I learned how to use Joomla!, a free and open source content management system. I also learned how to edit PHP scripting language and Cascading Style Sheets(CSS) to fit my design specifications. Finally I learned how to establish, manage and import content to a MYSQL® database.

Along with the obstacles that helped to shape my project, I was restricted in another sense by focusing on the importance of a consistent brand identity. A brand identity is the visual character of an organization, and it is often established through the logo design. The logo then determines the tone of all other marketing materials and the graphics standards of those pieces, including color palette, fonts, and style. A strong visual identity encourages brand recognition. Furthermore, the continuity of marketing materials helps the organization to be a unified and recognizable resource. While continuity is beneficial for identifying a brand, adhering to rules about branding also restricts the range of design possibilities and is disruptive to the creative process. Ultimately, when designing for a client, effectiveness may both trump personal creativity and promote it.

Working for a client is one aspect of my project that is not applicable to all capstone projects. My client plays an influential role in shaping the outcome of the project. From the beginning, I had to listen to the needs of Syracuse Grows,

and determine practical solutions to benefit the organization. Having a client also changes the way that I work, often for the better. I found that listening to my client helped to make my designs more purposeful. By creating multiple options for client review, I learned to become more versatile and strategic in using color, style, and orientation. Working with a client taught me to be flexible, patient, and willing to try multiple possibilities. In addition, by working with Jonnell and Elizabeth, we were able to share resources with each other. They were familiar with Joomla!, and I was familiar with design concepts and strategies. Through our collaboration, my client significantly guided the direction of this project.

Process

Over the past seven months, this project has evolved from a list of goals to a final product. After establishing the needs of the organization, I began researching ways to develop efficient communication among groups. Syracuse Grows needed a way to send and manage email communication between several different groups: their seven-member core, working groups and, community members. We determined that using Google Groups would be the best option for Syracuse Grows, because they already had Gmail. Google Groups and Gmail feature ways to organize contacts into groups for mass emailing. Jonnell, Elizabeth and I also discussed means for members of Syracuse Grows to host and share photos, grants, resources, and files. We decided that a Web site would be the best way to accomplish all of these needs. However, before I could design and populate the Web site, I had to establish the brand identity for Syracuse Grows.

One consideration in designing the brand identity for the organization was the audience. Syracuse Grows is a resource for local community members and an online resource. The branding must be attractive to many age groups, inviting for new members, and appropriate for representing an organization that promotes food education and justice. The branding process begins with creating the logo and designing the accompanying print media.

Print Media

Syracuse Grows provides coordination, programming, education, and resources to support equitable local food production, distribution and consumption through community gardening and urban agriculture. They conduct canning workshops and promote food justice and access. The community gardens in Syracuse grow carrots, squash, tomatoes, beans, peas, cantelope, swiss chard, grapes, apples, and various flowers for pollenation. As I brainstormed, sketched, and drafted the brand identity for Syracuse Grows I took all of that information and figured out a way to represnt it visually.

When I first started sketching, I considered these buzzwords: growth, health, sustainability, organic, community, security, nourishment, unity, and—of course—food. We chose a color palette of green, brown, and orange earth tones that symbolized growth and vitality. One of my original sketches included roots extending out from the serifs[1] of "syracuse grows." Roots can symbolize strength, support, and growth. Roots absorb water and nutrients and they also help to anchor the plant; in the same way Syracuse Grows is a network of roots that absorb knowledge and supply it to the community in an effort to unite and anchor

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[1] Serifs are the ornamental finishings on the strokes of each letter.

the city. However, the roots alone do not communicate the focus on food production and education in the logo. So rather than making roots the sole focus of the design, I used a typeface that replicates the nature of roots in its serifs. Plantagenet Cherokee is a serif font that is available on both Windows and Apple operating systems, so Syracuse Grows members are not restricted in access. The typeface looks organic and natural, and its neoclassical design helps to promote Syracuse Grows as a credible resource. I chose to set the logo in lowercase letters to symolize the grassroots identity of the organization.

Seven logos were presented to members of Syracuse Grows. The one that was chosen uses design principles and symbolism the represent the character of the organization (Appendix A. Figure 1). To the left of the organization's name is a circle containing a carrot, green beans, and tomatoes on the vine. The vegetables help to make the connection to gardening and food justice. They also help to symbolize the nourishment and vitality that the community gains through the work of Syracuse Grows. The circle around the vegetables makes the logo dynamic; using the Gestalt Principle of closure, in which the human eye perceives the rest of the information that is not there. Although the entire carrot is not visible, and the vegetables are displayed in white, the viewer is still able to fully perceive the shapes. The circle can also symbolize unity, nature, and sustainability. The final element of the logo, the tomato "o" in "grows" helps to link the multiple components of the logo together.

The stationery set consists of the letterhead, envelope, and business card. Jonnell advised me to design the letterhead in a way that would use the space

efficiently and without complicated margins. The logo and address placement on

a letterhead affect the size of the body-copy area. Many letterhead are printed on

special paper stock; the body copy is then printed afterward when the letterhead is

used. I designed the letterhead with ample area for body copy and unrestricted left

and right margins (Appendix A. Figure 2). This is especially imporatant because

the letterhead will be used to write several-page grant request letters. I also used

the tomato from the logo as a spacer between address information to tie in the

brand. The envelope is simple and features the logo with space underneath for a

return address (Appendix A. Figure 3). A logo variation is visible on the business

card where I chose to use a vertical orientation to accommodate additional contact

information. The back of the business card features a list of local gardens to

inform people about the gardens in their area (Appendix A. Figure 4). In addition

to the stationery set, I also designed a postcard mailer that features an image from

one of the gardens on the front, contact information on the back, and room for a

personal message (Appendix A. Figure 5). Syracuse Grows can use this postcard

to advertise events, ask for donations, or as a thank you card.

To continue the brand identity and to facilitate efficient communication, I

designed flyer and newsletter templates. Templates are used to keep a design

consistent from project to project while also being simple to update with new

information. The flyer and newsletter templates were created in Microsoft Word,

a program available on most computers. When the template is opened, the flyer

design is already present and includes a headline, background images, and the

organization's logo. In order to edit the template, someone can simply change the

text in the appropriate text box, or add a picture into an image frame. The use of the templates helps to extend the brand identity throughout the marketing materials. I wanted to achieve three goals with the flyer design: (1) to create a visual hierarchy for the event information; (2) to include space for images that could be changed based on the event; and (3) to remain consistent with the visual identity of Syracuse Grows. I used the information from an existing Syracuse Grows canning workshop flyer so that the amount of content would be consistent with realistic needs. The flyer template design allows someone to edit the content while also guiding them in the size, orientation, and hierarchy of the information (Appendix A. Figure 6). The flyer template remains simple so that it can be applied to a multitude of events.

The goal of the newsletter design was to create a template for upcoming events, press releases, and articles that would be visually engaging to the reader. An organized newsletter engages the readers by highlighting important information and headlines in a visually interesting way. Newsletters are also versatile because they can be sent as a PDF in an email, printed and distributed, or archived on a Web site. For continuity, I used the same background on both the flyer and the newsletter. I designed three pages of the newsletter: the front page and two inside pages. The page templates can be copied and used again for a longer newsletter; the three column system adds variety to the layout. I also incorporated images that could be changed based on content, which help to make the newsletter less static and flat (Appendix A. Figure 7). While the templates serve as guides, they can also be edited and changed based on the requirements of

each project. This allows members of Syracuse Grows to have both structure and artistic freedom appropriate to the event.

Web Design

      I started developing the Web site by designing the visual structure of the site including the header, background and menu style in InDesign. The domain name, www.syracusegrows.org, and web hosting was purchased in November, before the site was developed. So after I designed the visual template for the site, I published a temporary Web page so that interested users could find the mission statement, contact information, and meeting times online while the site was under construction. Jonnell and Elizabeth brainstormed the requirements of the site, and together we created a site map, which outlines the content and organization of the site (Appendix B. Figure 1).

      The most important requirement for the Web site was that it had to be sustainable. As mentioned previously, every aspect of this project will be used, without my assistance, in the future. In order to develop a Web site that could be updated without accessing the coding or using a web design program, the site requires a CMS. Having no prior experience with a CMS, Jonnell and Elizabeth suggested Joomla!, a free CMS that is also used by The Alchemical Nursery Project, Harvard University, and IHOP. The largest benefit to Joomla! is that it allows room for growth. New menu items, content, pictures, and components can be added easily through the back end of the site.

Learning to use Joomla! was the largest challenge in this project. After watching many tutorials, I learned how to load a local server environment and Joomla! onto my laptop, so that I could start work on the site offline. In order to create a design template for the site, I learned how to edit PHP scripting language and CSS and how to establish, manage and import content to a MYSQL® database. My previous knowledge of HTML helped me to understand these new coding languages, but my Honors Capstone Advisor, Assistant Professor Greg Hedges deserves the credit. Without Greg, there are many road blocks that I would not have conquered. Greg and I were able to work through many coding problems and design challenges throughout this project.

The design of the Web site is intentionally simple because I did not want Syracuse Grows to be limited on future additions to the site because of an unnecessary design aesthetic. In addition, I wanted the site to reflect simpler living, which coincides community gardening. The banner at the top of the Web site features pictures from the gardens, a canning workshop, and a community dinner. These images can be easily altered or replaced in the future.

There is a noticeable trend in Web design for menu bars to span across the top of the site. I intentionally chose to orient the menu bar vertically on the left side to accommodate any additions to the list that would make the menu longer. When horizontal menu bars become too long, they can break the site design by extending the menu on to two lines. The Web site uses Arial as body copy text, which also carries over to the flyer and newsletter template. Features on the site

include: a Google calendar, which can show multiple calendars at once; a photo

and video flash gallery; donations through Paypal; a resource list; testimonials,

gardening tips, and project request forms; contact information; and a link to the

Edible CNY Blog. Jonnell and Elizabeth decided not to include a new blog or

FAQ section on the Web site because Edible CNY Blog is a successful resource

for that service. However, the home page of the Syracuse Grows site does feature

a news feed where upcoming events and announcements can be posted.

Influence

My inspirations come from nature and the built environment, because I am

influenced by the natural magesty of this earth and the visual stimulus of human's

influence on the world. I am also inspired by every art museum in London, where

I spent a lot of my time while studying abroad in London. I am also influenced by

the design of Martha Stewart Living magazine, Design Observer's daily "Today"

post by Eric Baker, and the blog I Love Typography. I appreciate clean and

classic design that serves a purpose. I don't know when I became so utilitarian in

perspective, but I can only blame the film Helvetica.

In order to create a brand identity that accurately represented Syracuse

Grows, I researched other community gardening organizations to see their

branding and Web design. These organizations include: American Community

Gardening Association, Rochester Roots, Denver Urban Gardens, and Capital

District Community Gardens. For inspiration and understanding of how Joomla!

is utilized, I looked at the Web sites of Our North Side and The Alchemical

Nursery Project. For assistance with all technical aspects of Joomla!, I searched the Joomla! discussion forum and relevant Wikipedia pages.

The dedicated professors in the Visual & Interactive Communications Department and the Geography department at Syracuse University have taught me how to do design and communicate effectively. More importantly, they have taught me how to think critically about the content of the world and to live intentionally and consciously.

Meaning

The real meaning behind this work is a very loaded word: sustainability. This project was focused on the creation of a sustainable communications plan for a grassroots network focused on the education and practice of sustainable food practices. This project was also a study on the complexity and limitations of communication, and the importance of utility in design. Nonprofits are limited in their resources and capabilities, and designers must be thoughtful of their restrictions. However, limitations can also mean additional possibilities when designers think creatively. This project, hopefully, also means that Syracuse Grows will not be hindered in the future by their communication needs.

Conclusion

This project was a tremendous learning experience. I learned how to communicate with a real client, how to listen and cater to their needs and restrictions, and how to manage the completion of several assignments for one

client. I also learned new software and web coding. I had never looked at PHP scripting language before, and now I understand it; it has been challenging and fascinating. I have loved working with members of the community and working through design challenges that are specific to a nonprofit organization. One of the many challenges of this project is that community organizations have limited resources. We were able to tackle that problem by using the most up-to-date and free solutions. By taking advantage of the resources provided by Joomla! and Google, we were able to keep the communication plan of Syracuse Grows current and more importantly: sustainable. The largest benefit of this project is that Syracuse Grows now has an entire plan that can be updated continually in the future while still retaining the brand identity of the organization. The continuity of their marketing materials will help them to be a unified and recognizable resource in Syracuse. I am most grateful to Jonnell, Elizabeth, and Greg, for working with me every step of the way.

SOURCES CITED AND CONSULTED

The Alchemical Nursery Project.
    <http://www.alchemicalnursery.org/>.

American Community Gardening Association.
    <http://www.communitygarden.org/sitemap.php>.

Baker, Eric. "Today." Design Observer. <http://designobserver.com/>/

Boardley, John D. I Love Typography. <http://ilovetypography.com/>.

Capital District Community Gardens. <http://www.cdcg.org/>.

Denver Urban Gardens. <http://dug.org/>.

Joomla!. <http://www.joomla.org/>

Joomla!. Forum. <http://forum.joomla.org/>.

Our North Side. <http://ournorthside.org/>.

MAMP. <http://www.mamp.info/en/index.html>.

Rochester Roots. <http://rochesterroots.org/>.

APPENDIX A: PRINT MATERIAL

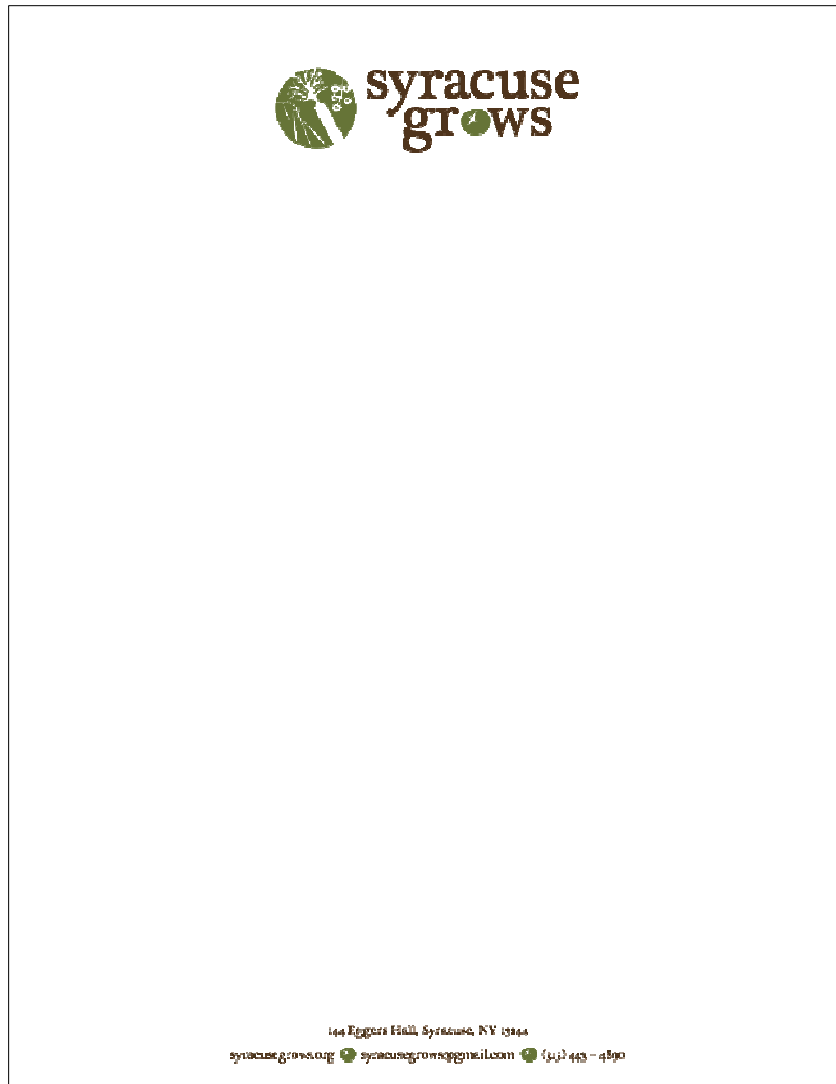*Figure A1*, Final logo design for Syracuse Grows.

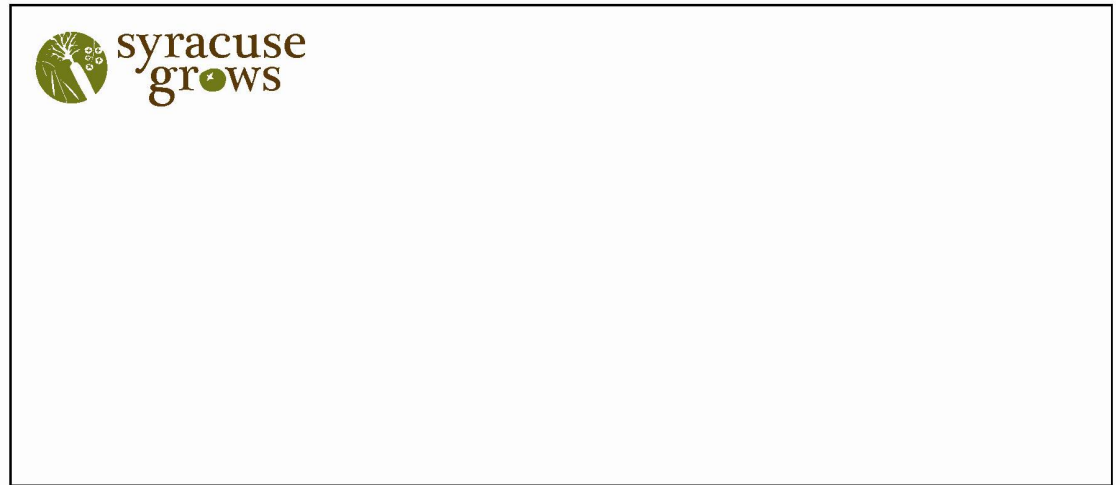*Figure A2*, Final letterhead design for Syracuse Grows

Figure A3, Envelope

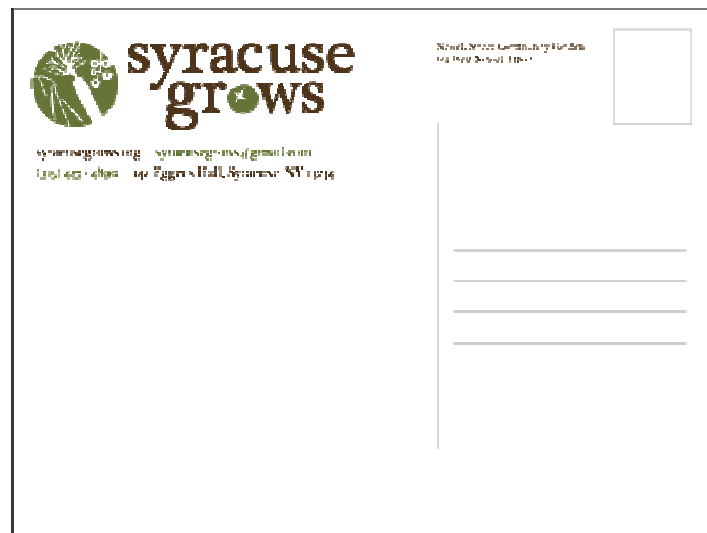*Figure A4*, Front and back of Syracuse Grows buisness card

Figure A5, Front and back of postcard design

Canning Workshop

COME MAKE APPLESAUCE
AND LEARN THE ART OF CANNING

Sunday, November 23, 3–6 p.m.

Teaching Kitchen, Lyman Hall Rm 229
College Place, Syracuse University

Space is limited
No experience or supplies needed
Fee: sliding scale $2-$5

Contact Greg Michel
315-424-9485 x 231
Gsm54@cornell.edu

Lyman Hall is on College Place near the intersection with University Place. There is a Centro stop in College Place and parking is available in the Ostrom Parking lot on the corner of Ostrom and University Place (across from Thornden Park Rose Garden). From the parking lot, walk down University Place to College Place, Lyman Hall is on the right.

syracuse grows

Syracuse Grows is a grassroots network cultivating a just foodscape in the City of Syracuse. We provide programming, education, and resources to grow equitable local food production, distribution and consumption through urban agriculture and community gardening.
syracusegrows.org . syracusegrows@gmail.com . (315) 443 – 4890

Figure A6, Flyer template design

syracuse grows Newsletter

April 2009 · Syracuse, New York · syracusegrows@gmail.com

IN THIS ISSUE

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 21, 11 am-3 pm
Get Your Green On Spring Festival

Blodgett School, 312 Oswego St
Fun, hands-on activities to engage children and adults in learning about sustainable living. Environmental themed activities will include bicycling to power light bulbs, potting plants to grow food in the spring, rain barrel painting and more. Local music and dance groups will perform throughout the event. The event is free and open to the public.

March 21 at 10 am
Growing our Greenspaces

Amy Samuels, Natural Resources Team Leader, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County presents: "Catch the Rain: Rain Gardens and Rain Barrels"

Bob Cecile Community Center, 176 West Seneca Turnpike, Syracuse

Learn how to install a rain barrel in your local park, community garden, or your own yard. Help reduce stormwater runoff while creating natural beauty in your environment. Free and open to the public.

Going Green. Welcome to Spring in Syracuse, summer is just around the corner which means beautiful gardens to tend to!

Westcott Neighborhood Bulb Project Announces Initiative Award

The Westcott Neighborhood Bulb project recently received an Initiative Grant from Syracuse University through its Campus-Community Entrepreneurship Initiative.

This grant has enabled us to upgrade our 2009 web site, *www.bulbproject.org* and add new features which include:
- A Bulb Project slide show on the neighborhood
- List of our 2009 raffle prizes and how to purchase tickets
- Photos and reports from last six years
- A downloadable brochure on the history of the project
- List of 10 books for gardening with children all available at Onondaga County Library
- Springtime Photo Contest Winners now in its second year
- Recent press releases
- How civic, church, schools & neighborhood organizations can request perennial bulbs for plantings in the neighborhood

Garden Art for Sale - Our newest feature

We are using a portion of the Kaufman Campus Initiative Grant to help artists from greater Syracuse, who produce garden related art and crafts to market their art. On our web site you can see photos, sales and contact information from artists who produce garden related art. Artists who create garden related art and are interested in having it featured on our Web site should contact us at pwirth2@verizon.net.

Figure A7, Front page of newsletter template.
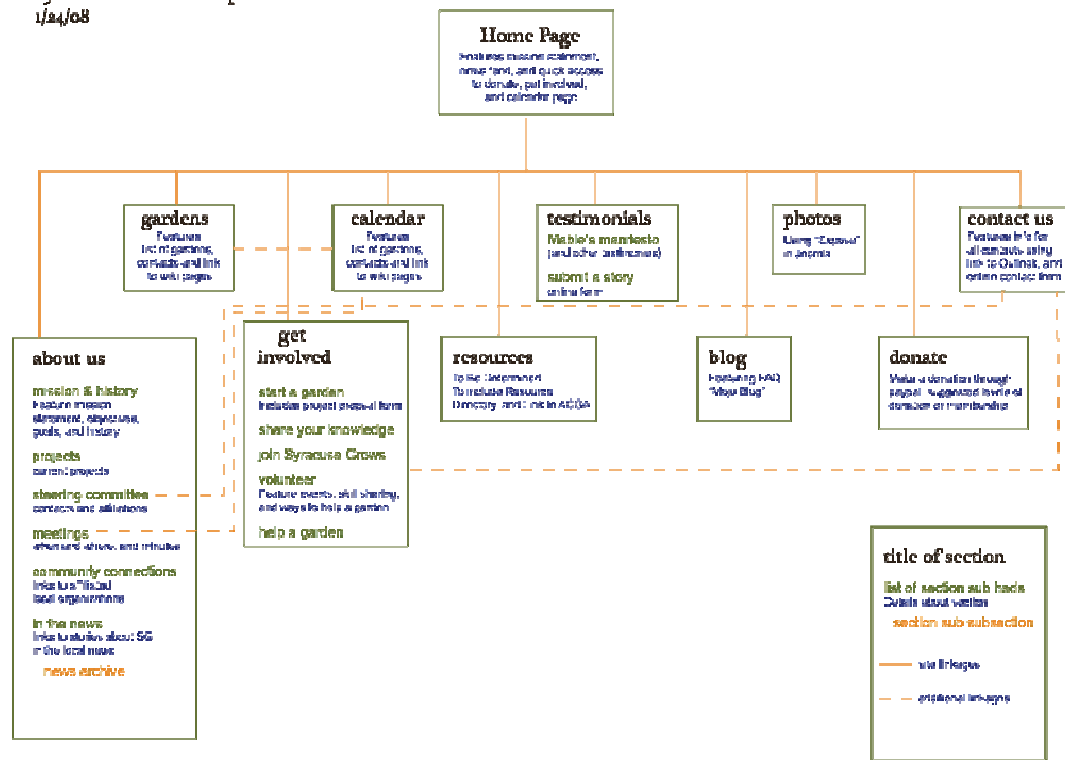
APPENDIX B: WEB CONTENT

Figure B1, Site map for Syracuse Grows Web site

Figure B2, Screen shot of temporary site.

Figure B3, About Us Page for Syracuse Grows Site

Figure B4, Calendar Page for Syracuse Grows Web site.

Figure B5, Administratice Back End of the Syacuse Grows site in Joomla!

WRITTEN SUMMARY OF CAPSTONE PROJECT

Syracuse Grows: Grassroots Communication

Introduction and Goals:

The Honors Capstone project represents the culmination of my undergraduate studies at Syracuse University. As a graphic arts and geography dual major I am interested in the importance of effective communication, the geographical implications of what we communicate about, and the way we talk about geography. This is why my Honors Capstone project is focused on creating a communications plan for Syracuse Grows, a grassroots network cultivating a just foodscape in the City of Syracuse. Throughout my schooling I have developed a passion for volunteering and working with nonprofit organizations. As a member of comm.UNITY (a student organization committed to connecting students interested in various fields of communications with local non-profit community organizations that need help to create sustainable communications plans) I have worked with local nonprofits and witnessed the difficulties that these organizations face in creating communications plans. Small budgets, overextended staff, and inaccessibility of design software can prevent these organizations from having successful communications. When volunteers create marketing materials as needed, over time nonprofits may end up with a hodgepodge of materials with no clear brand identity. The goal of my project is to provide a successful communications program for Syracuse Grows that represents their needs, reflects graphic principles, and promotes the organization. But most

importantly, this plan must be designed so that it can be updated and utilized after I finish my project.

Method:

In order to provide a successful communications plan for Syracuse Grows, I first had to determine the needed content for this plan. Throughout the course of this project I consulted with two members of Syracuse Grows: Jonnell Allen, the Community Geographer at SU, and Elizabeth Slate, the founder of The Alchemical Nursery Project. Together, we established five requirements for their communications plan: (1) to develop a coherent brand identity (including a logo, stationery set, and mailers); (2) to develop efficient communication within the group through listservs and a blog; (3) to develop a Web site that features upcoming events, community partners, photographs, grants, and maps of the gardens; (4) to create a template for future posters and advertising campaigns; and (5) and to create a template for a reoccurring newsletter.

After establishing the needs of the organization, the next step was to begin brainstorming, sketching, and drafting the brand identity for Syracuse Grows. The visual identity of the organization is the starting point for the rest of the work. The logo determines the tone of all other marketing materials and the graphics standards of those pieces, including color palette, fonts, and style. While working on the brand identity, I also researched group e-mail solutions for the organization, including listserv and group contact options. At this point in the project, Syracuse Grows also purchased web hosting for www.syracuseGrows.org. Once a logo was selected, I designed a stationery set

that included a letterhead, business card, envelope, and postcard mailer. In addition to working on these print pieces, we also began to discuss the needs of the Web site.

In every step of the process, utility of the product had to be considered. Questions arose, including: How could the letterhead be edited without a design program? Should I create a Microsoft Word file, or should copies of the letterhead be fed through a printer when use of the letterhead was required? What typefaces can we use that are available on most computers or free for our use? How can the Web site content be updated without dealing with HTML code? Each of these questions provided a design challenge that often occurs in grassroots communications, but they also provided learning experiences.

When working on the Web site, I started by designing the visual structure of the site including the header, background and menu style. I established a temporary Web site page so that interested persons could find the mission statement, contact information, and meeting times online while the site was under construction. In building the site, we chose to use Joomla!, a free content management system (CMS), which enables you to build Web sites that can be easily updated without editing code. Jonnell, Elizabeth and I worked on a site map, which outlines the content and organization of the site. While they worked on created content for the site (text, images, etc.), I worked with my capstone advisor Greg Hedges to created the skeleton structure and design of the site. As work progressed, I added content to the site.

At this point in the project, I also began to work on a template for a flyer and a newsletter. Templates are used to keep a design consistent from project to project while also being simply to update with new information. The flyer and newsletter templates were created in Microsoft Word, a program available on most computers. When the template is opened, the flyer design is already present and includes a headline, background images, and the organization's logo. In order to edit the template, someone can simple change the text in the appropriate text box, or add picture into an image frame. The use of the templates helps to extent the brand identity throughout all of the marketing materials.

Conclusion:

This project has been a tremendous learning experience. I have learned how to communicate with a real client, how to listen and cater to their needs and restrictions, and how to manage the completion of several assignments for one client. I have also learned new software and web coding. I had never looked at PHP scripting language before, and now I understand it; it has been challenging and fascinating. I have loved working with members of the community and working through design challenges that are specific to a nonprofit organization. One of the many challenges of this project is that community organization have limited resources. We were able to tackle that problem by using the most up-to-date and free solutions for the organization. By taking advantage of the resources provided by Joomla! and Google, we were able to keep the communication plan of Syracuse Grows current and more importantly: sustainable. The largest benefit of this project is that Syracuse Grows now has an entire communication plan that

can be updated continually in the future while still retaining the brand identity of

the organization. The continuity of their marketing materials will help them to be

a unified and recognizable resource in Syracuse.