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GO GREEN-EAT SLOW: A Public Relations Approach To “Going Green”

Amanda Gaynor

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The Evolution of My Capstone Project

Every year in college represents a unique period of discovery. With each passing year we expand our intellect and our social networks grow. As we indulge in new experiences we slowly, but surely, become adjusted to our own independence. For me, each year has been significant for a multitude of reasons. But what stands out the most is my junior year when I began to notice a measurable advance in my cognitive skills. Ironically, this was the same year that I did a great deal of preliminary thinking, reasoning, and decision making about my Honors Capstone Thesis.

When I began to think about ideas for my Capstone topic, my mind was blank. The concept of a thesis was difficult enough, let alone figuring out what I was going to do for my Honors thesis. After weeks of reflection, I was without a topic. I felt that there was no way that I was going to miraculously settle on a topic. I knew it would be best if my topic was related to my public relations major, and something I was passionate about. Eventually a kernel of an idea started to take shape.

It is hard to believe now, but my Capstone project originally stemmed from a public relations writing assignment. The assignment was to team up a real-life company with a non-profit organization for a mock event. Specifically, the assignment was to create a professional media kit for the event, containing all the materials needed to launch a publicity campaign. My passion for the culinary arts led me to select Food Network as the company. I paired them up with two non-profits Action Against Hunger and The Emeril Lagasse Foundation. My idea

was to have a celebrity chef cook-off between Bobby Flay and Emeril Lagasse where each would cook to benefit their charity. The winning chef would have the sponsor-supplied prize money donated to his charity, and the losing chef would have the event proceeds donated to his charity. I took great pride in the media kit that I created, and it got me thinking about a possible topic for my Capstone thesis. Could I somehow expand upon my media kit and generate a Capstone project?

It was then that I began to think about my Capstone project on a more realistic level. Instead of Food Network and celebrity chefs, I thought about all of the food tasting events that are hosted annually near my hometown. In short order, my media kit had given rise to a study on launching a publicity campaign for a food tasting event. I spent the summer of 2008 conducting field research on how these food tastings were planned, organized, publicized and, ultimately, carried out. (See publicity on selected food tastings, appendix, pp. 1-3). I interviewed a variety of different professionals, including publicity chairs, event planners, public relations professionals, restaurateurs, and many others who were involved in the execution of these food tastings. (See sample interview questions, appendix, pp. 4-13). Finally, I began to develop a concrete concept for my Capstone project. But then I had an epiphany. In the midst of conducting my field research, I started to entertain the idea of hosting an actual food tasting event at Syracuse University. Holding a real event would allow me to implement my research in a tangible and engaging manner, as opposed to my research just appearing as type in a written paper. My event, titled ***GO GREEN-EAT SLOW***,

marks Syracuse University's first tasting event to celebrate "going green." (See event business card, appendix, p. 14). Moreover, this event is the product of my original thoughts and ideas, research and time, hard work and determination, and passion and perseverance. Considering how I started, I never imagined my Capstone project would be what it has grown into today. **GO GREEN-EAT SLOW** represents an innovative way to engage the campus with the local community for social benefit.

Conceptualizing My Capstone Project in Greater Detail

As previously described, my Capstone project is rooted in public relations and the launching of a specific publicity campaign. Many times, advertising and public relations campaigns are quite similar in nature. Essentially, they are both trying to portray something in a positive light in hopes of changing consumer behavior through purchasing, attending, supporting, or other methods. This is known as marketing communication.¹

After some preliminary communication with Syracuse University personnel over the summer, I arrived at school anxious to start planning my Capstone event. I first had to decide on a theme. "The best publicity campaigns have a unified theme that people can quickly and easily understand and identify with."² With this rule in mind, I had to identify my target audience. The target

¹ Boyle, E. (2004). Press and publicity management: the Dyson case. *Corporate Communications*, 9,(209). Retrieved March 20, 2009, from ProQuest database.

² *Publicity Guide*. Retrieved March 25, 2009, from www.savethechildren.org/publications/community-engagement/publicity-guide.pdf

audience for this project is college students, Syracuse University faculty and staff, and community members. Although I had originally wanted to have a gourmet food tasting similar to the ones that I had studied near my hometown, this theme was no longer appropriate because the target audience was completely different. After considering a number of different themes, I settled on “going green.” Not only is the green movement a timely topic, but also “going green” has become a trend. (See selected article on the green movement, appendix, p. 15). It has been branded for consumers through clothing, transportation, fashion accessories, and as mentioned earlier, restaurants. Therefore, I decided “going green” was exemplary of a comprehensive and relatable theme.

The phrase “go green” has gained almost cliché status in representing ecological awareness. Maybe no one thing is more responsible for this outcome than Ex-Vice President Al Gore’s documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*. However, I wanted to encourage people to “go green” in a different way than they might originally consider - through food.

Inextricably intertwined with the green movement when it comes to food is the slow food movement. The phrase “eating slow” is derived from the “slow food” movement, which was created as a counterpoint to the fast food movement. (See selected articles on the slow food movement, appendix, pp. 16 & 17). “Eating slow” is more directly defined as an effort to promote the eating of local, sustainable foods. The October 2008 issue of *Continental* magazine published an illuminating article about eating green. To “eat green” (or slow) “means acknowledging that what we eat doesn’t begin and end in the supermarket aisle.

How and where food is grown or raised, how it's processed, and how it gets into your hands can have a big impact on your health, your local economy, and the environment.”³

“Going green” with food has recently become a trend in the restaurant business. Near the start of the New Year, a restaurant called Fresh opened in Basking Ridge, New Jersey. An article from *The Home News Tribune* notes that Fresh is “as much about a philosophy of sustainable, healthy living as it is a place to eat.”⁴ From the food to the floor, they follow this philosophy. The flooring of the restaurant is made from a sustainable harvested wood, and the Fresh menu is dedicated to organic, preservative-free food and deli favorites. Locally, I discovered Strong Hearts Café, another restaurant dedicated to slow eating. “Strong Hearts Café offers a 100% vegan menu of organic and locally grown and produced food.”⁵ Additionally, Jamie Lauren, “cheftestant” on the most recent season of “Top Chef” and executive chef at Absinthe Brasserie & Bar in San Francisco, California, is a big proponent of the slow food movement and expresses this through her cooking. “Absinthe’s menu echoes Lauren’s commitment to organic, locally grown, seasonal ingredients.”⁶

Moreover, restaurants in the heart of one of the world’s most desired metropolises are announcing the importance of slow eating. Icon Restaurant in

³ Koerth-Baker, M. (October 2008). Eating Green: Three simple ways to join the sustainable-food trend. *Continental*. 90-91.

⁴ Heyman, L. (2009, January 14). A fresh approach: Basking Ridge eatery goes organic with fast food. *The Home News Tribune*, pp. B3, B4.

⁵ (Winter 2008). Healthy on the road. *Visitors Guide* (Syracuse), 65.

⁶ *Jamie Lauren, Executive Chef* (Biography). Retrieved April 6, 2009, from http://www.absinthe.com/press_bios_jl.html

the W Hotel in New York City recently developed a brunch menu entitled “Going Green.” The menu includes items such as drinks made from organic fruits and vegetables, chicken that has been grown without the use of antibiotics or hormones, and a fresh Heirloom tomato tart.

The “slow food” movement has also expanded in another form of food promotion - markets. For example, Slow Food Central New Jersey, a chapter of Slow Food USA, hosts a monthly winter farmers’ market called “Eat Local.” This trend continues as people begin to seek local, fresh produce all year long. For instance, in New London, Connecticut, local farmers work together to have product for the Fiddleheads winter farm market. In January 2009, *The Hartford Courant* did a feature story on the Fiddleheads market. Don Henry of Highland Thistle Farm in Canterbury, Connecticut, thinks the winter markets are positive for both the farmers and the local community. “It helps with our cash flow through the winter. Plus, it supplies our summer customers with fresh produce through the winter.”⁷ In addition, the Northern New Jersey chapter of Slow Food has brought together local farmers and local food artisans for an event titled “Local Harvest: NJ Farms, Food & Family.”⁸

Similar market trends have also been adopted in the Syracuse area. The Central New York Regional Market was recently featured in *Visitors Guide* (Syracuse), described as a market that brings together all of the local farmers’

⁷ Grant, S. (2009, January 8). The Hunt for Winter’s Bounty: Local farm markets growing in popularity as consumers seek out fresh produce all year. *The Hartford Courant*, p. C6.

⁸ Heyman, L. (2009, January). Local harvest day spotlights community-supported farming. *The Home News Tribune*. p. B4.

markets to sell their product in one place. It “showcases a huge variety of fresh and local produce for the CNY community.”⁹ Even local supermarkets have joined in and now feature entire sections of organic food. Having gone mainstream, it appears that the green, slow food movement is here to stay.

With a “going green, slow food” theme in place, I needed to unify the event. ***GO GREEN-EAT SLOW*** involves three factors, each of which are pertinent to the purpose of the event individually, but also work well together. The first part is the restaurants. (See list of restaurants and contacts, appendix, pp. 18-22). Because the focus is local food, I wanted to stay local with the restaurant selection. I sought out restaurants on Marshall Street and Westcott Street. (See letter to restaurants, appendix, p. 23). The restaurants represent the trend toward local, sustainable food. Therefore, it was important to make sure that all participants obtain their product from a local distributor.

The second part in unifying the event was bringing in farmers. (See list of farmers and contacts, appendix, pp. 24 & 25). Every fall, SU holds a University Community Harvest in which local farmers come to campus, set up their markets, and sell fresh products. It seemed only natural to invite these farmers to participate in this new event. (See letter to farmers, appendix, p. 26). The farmers’ presence, and being able to visualize “freshness” and “locality,” truly highlights the idea of “going green.”

Finally, there had to be incentive. According to Ronald Smith’s book *Strategic Planning for Public Relations*, the persuasion model of communication

⁹ (Winter 2008). Healthy on the road. *Visitors Guide* (Syracuse), 65.

“consciously attempts to influence people, using ethical means that enhance a democratic society.”¹⁰ I wanted *GO GREEN-EAT SLOW* to do just this; and stand for something more than just an environmental concern. In every interview I conducted over the summer, professionals told me the same thing when I asked about how to convince the restaurants to participate. Restaurants will respond to a charity. (See selected articles on charity food tastings, appendix, pp. 27-29). In an interview with Illyse Rubin, the regional director for the annual “Chefs with Heart” food tasting benefit, she spoke of the best way to obtain restaurant participation. “Everyone can relate to a personal story,” said Rubin.¹¹ Rubin continued by noting that when people know that someone in need is going to benefit from what you are doing, they will be interested. Aside from personal interest, being associated with a charity reflects positively on the restaurant’s image and reputation. In keeping with the focus of good food for a good cause, I chose to feature the Food Bank of Central New York as the charity.

With these three key factors in place, *GO GREEN-EAT SLOW* represents a unified theme. The convergence of the restaurants, farmers, and the food bank give the event substance, purpose, and appeal to the target audience.

From Idea to Fruition: Organization and Planning

Once the idea was in place, logistics needed to be organized and planned. Because Syracuse University supported this event, I had to work hand-in-hand with the staff in planning. Bridget Talbot, director of Student Center and

¹⁰ Smith, R. D. (2005). *Strategic planning for public relations*, 2(119).

¹¹ (I. Rubin, personal communication, June 20, 2008)

Programming Services, was my first contact. I explained my idea to her over the summer and we discussed a variety of ways to make such an event actually work. (See SU event proposal, appendix, pp. 30-32). Once I was on campus, I began meeting with Talbot on a weekly basis to discuss progress. She knew all of the people that would need to be involved, including food services, parking, health and risk management, and public safety. (See initial meeting agenda, appendix, p. 33).

One effective public relations method for organizing my project was to answer six questions, known as the six Ws - Who, What, When, Where, Why, and Whom.¹² The answers are crucial to any successful publicity campaign. For my event, the six Ws are answered as follows.

Who: Amanda Gaynor, Student Coordinator and Event Chairperson
What: A “go green” themed food tasting event - **GO GREEN-EAT SLOW**
When: Wednesday, April 29, 2009 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Where: Waverly Parking Lot
Why: To highlight “going green” through a unique event
Whom: The Food Bank of Central New York

Although defining the six Ws may seem simple, figuring out all the logistics was deceptively difficult and took much longer than I expected. Through communication and teamwork with Syracuse University faculty and staff, I was able to move forward with planning.

Because of a university rule stating that students are not allowed to put on an event by themselves, one of the first tasks was to obtain sponsors. These sponsors did not have to be monetary sponsors, but rather supporters of the event

¹² *Planning Your Publicity Campaign*. Retrieved March 20, 2009, from www.campuslife.rit.edu/admin/greekadmin/files

that would stand behind it and lend credibility. My sponsors include the Renée Crown University Honors Program, the Sustainability Division, the Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency (OCCRA), and the Alpha Xi Delta sorority. I specifically chose these sponsors for different reasons. The Honors program is providing me with monetary funding in the form of a grant. Both the Sustainability Division and OCCRA became involved because of the event's promotion of "going green." Finally, I am a member of Alpha Xi Delta and knew they would be interested in supporting a philanthropic cause. In addition, I have recruited some of the sorority members to serve as volunteers.

Because there are many people and organizations involved, along with countless tasks to be performed, efficient communication was key. Many professionals will argue that the absolute most important ingredient of public relations is two-way communication. Two-way communication "uses communication to negotiate with publics, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its publics."¹³ This particular project follows two-way symmetrical communication. Symmetrical communication is "honest and open," rather than persuasive, "emphasizes negotiation, and focuses on mutual respect."¹⁴ As the event coordinator and chairperson of this project, I communicate with about fifty people on a continuous basis about endless logistics.

¹³ Grunig's *Four Models of Public Relations*. Retrieved March 23, 2009, from <http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/Fall99/Westbrook/models.htm>

¹⁴ Grunig, J.E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*.

Perhaps the primary communication I have been engaged in for this event was with the restaurants. Through my field research, I learned that it was not enough to call restaurants about the event; you had to make time to personally visit them. In my “Chefs with Heart” interview, Rubin stressed the importance of a “one-on-one visit” to the restaurants.¹⁵ Face-to-face communication always proves the most convincing because it allows people to truly connect. According to Richard Weiner’s “seven rules of effective communication,” the number one rule is to use facial and body language appropriately. “Studies indicate that 93% of the emotional meaning that we take from other people is in their facial expressions and tone of voice.”¹⁶ Joann O’Hara, a marketing coordinator who organized “An Evening of Good Taste for the Educated Palate” in Middlesex, New Jersey, remarked that she persuaded restaurants to participate by explaining that the proceeds go toward a scholarship for Middlesex County Community College.¹⁷ Helping restaurateurs recognize that their involvement would generate favorable publicity for them, build relations with the local community, aid a needy charity, and be worthwhile, has tested my communications skills for months. (See top 10 flyer, appendix, p. 34). I was even given advice on how to respond when a restaurant cannot be involved. Michelle Wilson of “Chef’s Night,” a food tasting charity for Elijah’s Promise, suggested asking the restaurants to make some kind of donation to the event, whether monetary, or

¹⁵ (I. Rubin, personal communication, June 20, 2008)

¹⁶ Weiner, R. (2008). The seven rules of effective communication. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 52(9). Retrieved March 23, 2009, from ProQuest database.

¹⁷ (J. O’Hara, personal communication, June 23, 2008)

something that can be raffled.¹⁸ I have had many restaurants elect not to participate, but agree to donate a gift certificate for a raffle.

There were countless tasks critical to the planning of this event. One of the hardest tasks I faced in the beginning was trying to create a budget for something in which I had no prior experience. This was one time that my field research was not helpful because the nature of the researched events is very different from *GO GREEN-EAT SLOW*. The two main differences are that the events I studied had rather extravagant budgets and they occurred on an annual basis. “This has been going on for so long and the event has made such a name for itself over the years that its acclaim makes it cost almost no money,” said Marie Hughes of “Taste of Somerset.”¹⁹ For example, a majority of the “Taste of Somerset” budget goes to the venue, amounting to approximately \$7,000. However, no money is spent on publicity. The event has become so popular that the newspapers run free advertising. This was proved further with “Chefs with Heart.” The event has become so established that they provide media sponsors (radio, magazines, newspapers) with tickets to the event, and in return, the event is not charged for advertising.²⁰ Although the budget I created at the start of this project proved essential for obtaining funding, it has changed dramatically over time as details of the event emerge. (See original budget, appendix, p. 35 & see final accounting, appendix, p. 36).

¹⁸ (M. Wilson, personal communication, June 26, 2008)

¹⁹ (M. Hughes, personal communication, June 13, 2008)

²⁰ (I. Rubin, personal communication, June 20, 2008)

Another key factor in planning was the creation of timing and action calendars. I generated these calendars on almost a weekly basis, with unfinished tasks carrying over week to week. (See timing and action calendars, appendix, pp. 37-42). I quickly learned the importance of staying flexible about what tasks could be accomplished and on what timetable. For example, I had originally planned to have all participating restaurants committed, with signed indemnity agreements executed, by the end of November 2008. (See indemnity agreement, appendix, p.43). As things progressed, I realized that this was not realistic and calendar revisions were needed.

The “to do” list for the planning of this event was endless. In fact, there is still much to do even when the event is over. However, the time spent in planning and organizing has been critical, as it has now paved the way for an instrumental publicity campaign, and hopefully, a successful event. (See scaled drawing of event layout, appendix, p. 44).

Publicity: Getting the Word Out

Without public awareness, an event will fail. Publicity is the most important piece to the puzzle. “Publicity gets you what you need and sometimes what you don’t even think you need,” said Jasmine Rinde, event coordinator for Jasmine Rinde Public Relations.²¹ In public relations, there are five basic publics

²¹ (J. Rinde, personal communication, July 8, 2008)

to consider when determining publicity outlets.²² I have applied these basic publics to *GO GREEN-EAT SLOW* as follows.

- 1) **Internal:** Renée Crown University Honors Program, Sustainability Division, Alpha Xi Delta, OCCRA, family and friends
- 2) **Campus:** undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, administration, alumni
- 3) **Community:** the Food Bank of Central New York, residents of Syracuse and the surrounding areas, local restaurants, public officials
- 4) **Visiting Publics:** tour groups of prospective or already accepted students, international students
- 5) **General:** media, members of civic organizations, and businesspersons

These are the best targets for publicity that can make the event a success.

There were times when I faced limitations in planning publicity. One important factor that I had to consider was the budget. Budget constraints often control the extent and type of publicity. Working with a limited budget demands many difficult decisions and strong creativity. For example, I had to sacrifice color in the event programs in order to keep costs down. Therefore, the design of the program had to be much better in order to compensate for lack of color. (See event program, appendix, pp. 45 & 46). However, as I thought it was key for the color green to appear in the event flyers, I made an extra effort to negotiate a favorable copying cost that the budget could handle. (See event flyer, appendix, p. 47). In terms of decorations and the “look” of the event, I kept things simple, while trying to stretch my creative ideas.

Another limitation of publicity is that it is not possible to guarantee placement.²³ I reached out to an extensive amount of media outlets; however, I

²² *Planning Your Publicity Campaign*. Retrieved March 20, 2009, from www.campuslife.rit.edu/admin/greekadmin/files

²³ *Planning your publicity*. (1999). *Professional Builder*, 64, Retrieved March 23, 2009, from ProQuest database.

know that it is unlikely I will get coverage from all outlets. It is important to “think big” with a media list in order to maximize the number of opportunities for placement or coverage.

According to the public relations department of Food Network, there are three tiers of publicity – pre-publicity, day-of publicity, and post publicity. Pre-publicity is defined as getting the word out in any effective way, whether it be flyers, mass e-mails, media relationships, or simply word-of-mouth. (See media list, appendix, p. 48). Day-of publicity is defined as actual event coverage by the media. Post publicity is defined as the spreading of information about the success of the event, an especially important focus if the event is annual.²⁴ There is such a thing as publicizing too early, but there is no such thing as publicizing too late. “Publicity should be out at least one week before the activity takes place.”²⁵ Even publicity released weeks earlier will at least plant the seed for awareness. (See Record article, appendix, p. 49). Perhaps people will become curious and intrigued to learn more. If information is released too early, however, the public easily might forget. **GO GREEN-EAT SLOW** has a flyer that alerts the public to the event. The flyer was posted throughout campus, in participating restaurants, and in the local community about three weeks before the event. In addition, press releases and other information should generally be released to media outlets approximately three weeks prior to the event, with a follow up one to two weeks before the event. (See pres release, appendix, pp. 50 & 51). A couple of days

²⁴ (L. Krueger, personal communication, August, 6, 2008)

²⁵ *Planning Your Publicity Campaign*. Retrieved March 20, 2009, from www.campuslife.rit.edu/admin/greekadmin/files

before the event, the final push of publicity begins. This is the time to take bigger action, such as in this case a large and visible advertisement in the *Daily Orange* the day before the event. A week before the event, or sometimes the day of, public relations professionals might release a media alert. Unlike a press release, newsroom personnel should be able to scan this in ten seconds and get a complete understanding of the event.²⁶

As mentioned, the post publicity for *GO GREEN-EAT SLOW* is just as important as the pre-publicity. For instance, a news article about the event or any charitable donation allows the public to reflect positively on what happened. (See selected articles of post publicity, appendix, pp. 52 & 53). Many stations air television coverage of events the day after as a form of recap or evaluation. Not only does this reinforce the good feelings of those who attended, but suggests to those who did not attend that they missed out. This constitutes the first piece of publicity for next year's event - the seed has been planted.

My field research proved interesting in regards to what was the most successful medium. A majority of the professionals said that newspapers were the best medium. Some argued that posters and newspaper advertisements were the most beneficial. Others maintained that radio was the most successful, while another said that radio did not prove worthwhile. Interestingly enough, the well-established events that have been taking place for years did not participate in online advertising. However, this being the first event for "An Evening of Good Taste for the Educated Palate," when discussing publicity with Joann O'Hara, she

²⁶*Media Alert*. Retrieved March 23, 2009, from <https://www.media-alert.com/what.aspx>

wanted to broaden their publicity as wide as possible in the hopes of establishing an annual event. Therefore, she found it helpful to reach out to both print and online media.²⁷ (See publicity e-mails, appendix, pp. 54-57 & see Web site postings, appendix, pp. 58-61).

Within the confines of my budget, I attempted to implement much of what I had learned about a successful publicity campaign. I hope that attendance for ***GO GREEN-EAT SLOW*** demonstrates that good publicity choices were made.

Above and Beyond the Classroom: The Significance of My Capstone Project

The Capstone project has stretched my public relations knowledge through researching, studying, analyzing, and implementing material on a higher level than what is typical in the classroom. A Capstone thesis is meant to teach more through a unique and advanced curriculum. This is precisely what my Capstone project has done for me. My decision to turn ***GO GREEN-EAT SLOW*** into a reality is truly what brought my Capstone project above and beyond the norm. It placed me in a real-life situation that I am likely to experience in the public relations profession. It has taught me more than I ever thought possible about communication, planning, organization, and the numerous other tasks that are required for event planning, promotion, and a publicity campaign.

My time in the classroom at SU has certainly been advantageous, but my Capstone project represents more than just an academic undertaking. ***GO GREEN-EAT SLOW*** is an initiative that stands for the importance of “going

²⁷ (J. O’Hara, personal communication, June 23, 2008)

green” through a convergence of different groups. I have gained a great deal of knowledge and experience in the field of public relations in the classroom and through internships and field research. But the most exciting aspect of my Capstone project was being able to apply what I had learned and implement something real and effective on the campus and positive for the community. Aside from good attendance for the benefit of the food bank, I hope for **GO GREEN-EAT SLOW** to be more than just another part of the environmental trend. I aspire for it to be something new and innovative that brings people together who share a sincere concern and interest in something of timely significance. The blueprint for **GO GREEN-EAT SLOW** now exists and waits for someone else to implement next year, and maybe for years to come.

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APPENDIX for
GO GREEN-EAT SLOW:
A Public Relations Approach to “Going Green”

APPENDIX

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WRITTEN SUMMARY

Introduction:

It was not until relatively recently that the public relations profession took on such importance in society. As a result, the study of public relations has become increasingly popular in colleges across the country. Universities that offer communications as a major now incorporate at least some level of public relations into their curriculum. But even with this emphasis in the field, many people still find themselves asking, “What exactly is public relations?”

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, public relations is defined as “the occupation of establishing or maintaining a good relationship between an organization or an important person and the general public.”²⁸ But there is much more under the public relations umbrella, such as marketing, advertising, event planning, charitable donations, and publicity.

This Capstone project is rooted in public relations and the launching of a specific publicity campaign. My passion for the culinary arts led me to investigate the local food tasting events that are hosted annually near my hometown with an eye towards creating a mock publicity campaign for a celebrity cook-off. I spoke with public relations representatives, publicity chairs, event planners, restaurateurs, and many others who play roles in the planning and execution of these food tastings. Shortly before returning to Syracuse for my senior year, I had an epiphany. Instead of a publicity campaign for a fictitious event, why not implement my research and have an actual food tasting event of

²⁸ Public relations. (n.d.). In *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Retrieved March 20, 2009, from <http://www.oed.com>

my own design in the Syracuse area? Indeed, that is what I decided to do, with public relations' strategies and tactics, along with the specialties of event planning and publicity, laying at the heart of my Capstone project.

The Concept:

Similar to advertising campaigns, “the best publicity campaigns have a unified theme that people can quickly and easily understand and identify with.”²⁹

The most important factor in conceptualizing a theme is to consider the target audience. For purposes of this project, my audience is college students, community members, and Syracuse University faculty and staff. Unlike the “foodie” target audiences in my hometown, I reasoned that a food tasting at SU would be more successful with a theme other than gourmet food. After careful consideration of many possible themes, I chose “going green.” College students have become increasingly aware of the “green movement” for a number of reasons, but mainly “going green” has become a trend. It is the new, hot topic. It is considered cool to “be green.” “Green” has been branded in the consumer world through, for example, clothing, products, and restaurants. Therefore, “going green” represents a comprehensible and relatable theme.

In addition to settling on an appropriate and timely theme, I needed to put together the key ingredients that were going to unify this event. The restaurants would represent the recent trend toward slow, sustainable food. Slow food

²⁹ *Publicity Guide*. Retrieved March 25, 2009, from www.savethechildren.org/publications/community-engagement/publicity-guide.pdf

preserves the cultural cuisine and the associated plants and animals through farming within a particular eco-region. In other words, the “slow food movement” is committed to using more local, organic foods, whether at home or in restaurants. To further unify the food tasting event, it seemed obvious that the farmers growing the local food ought to be included. Therefore, the tasting is joined with a farmers’ market. Bringing the farmers on campus to sell their product truly highlights the theme of “going green.” Finally, I wanted a charity that would benefit from the event. Through my field research I learned that tying a charity with any event creates incentive for all participants. It makes attendees feel good about themselves to know they supported a charitable event. For restaurants, it reflects positively on both their image and reputation. In keeping with the focus of good food for a good cause, I selected the Food Bank of Central New York as the charity. It is the convergence of the restaurants, the farmers, and the food bank that gives this event a unified theme that appeals to the target audience.

Once the theme and overall concept were in place, it was necessary to create an event title for future publicity. This event is called ***GO GREEN-EAT SLOW***.

Organization and Planning:

Every successful event requires organization and planning before launching the publicity campaign. Six questions, known as the “six Ws,” must be answered before publicity can begin: Who, What, When, Where, Why and

Whom.³⁰ These terms must be defined because they are crucial for a successful campaign. Through communication and teamwork with SU faculty and staff, I was able to figure out these deceptively difficult logistics and start planning **GO GREEN-EAT SLOW**. One of the most surprising Ws in my campaign is the “who.” Essentially, I am organizing and planning this event by myself. Although I am receiving a great deal of advice from interested parties, this is more of a one-woman project than a team effort. I did obtain sponsors for the event, including the Sustainability Division, the Renée Crown University Honors Program, Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency (OCCRA), and the Alpha Xi Delta sorority. It is from these organizations that I will gain volunteers to help with the many details of the event itself.

Because there are many people and organizations involved, and countless tasks to be performed, efficient communication is key. Many professionals will argue that the absolute most important ingredient of public relations is two-way communication. Two-way communication “uses communication to negotiate with publics, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its publics.”³¹ This particular project follows two-way symmetrical communication. Symmetrical communication is “honest and open,” rather than persuasive, “emphasizes negotiation, and focuses on mutual respect.”³² As the event coordinator and chairperson of this project, I

³⁰ *Planning Your Publicity Campaign*. Retrieved March 20, 2009, from www.campuslife.rit.edu/admin/greekadmin/files

³¹ *Grunig's Four Models of Public Relations*. Retrieved March 23, 2009, from <http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/Fall99/Westbrook/models.htm>

³² Grunig, J.E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*

communicate with about fifty people on a continuous basis about endless logistics.

Perhaps the central communication I have been engaged in for this event is with the restaurants. In my field research, I learned a variety of different strategies to convince restaurants to participate. Helping restaurateurs recognize that their involvement would generate favorable publicity for them, build relations with the local community, aid a needy charity, and be worthwhile, has tested my communications skills for months.

In addition, planning and organization for this event has involved a myriad of other tasks. For instance, a budget was developed, timing and action calendars were created and often revised, a location was found, supplies were arranged, security was contacted, and various permits were discussed. In fact, the “to do list” is nearly endless. However, the hours of time spent planning and organizing are critical, as it paves the way for an instrumental publicity campaign and, ultimately, a successful event.

Publicity:

Getting the word out about an event is the number one way to ensure success. Public awareness is essential. Of course, budget constraints often control the extent and type of publicity. Working with a limited budget demands many difficult decisions and strong creativity.

There are some “rules” to consider when releasing publicity. There is such a thing as publicizing too early, but there is no such thing as publicizing too

late. Even publicity released weeks later will at least plant the seed for awareness. Perhaps this will get people curious and intrigue them to learn more. If information is released too early, the public easily might forget. ***GO GREEN-EAT SLOW*** has a flyer that alerts the public to the event and will be posted around campus, in participating restaurants, and elsewhere about four weeks ahead of the event, and again about two weeks later. In addition, press releases and other information should generally be released to media outlets approximately two weeks prior to the event. A couple of days before the event, the final push of publicity begins. This is the time to take bigger action, such as in this case a large and visible advertisement in the *Daily Orange* the day before the event. A week before the event, or sometimes the day of, public relations professionals might release a media alert. Unlike a press release, a newsroom personnel should be able to scan this in ten seconds and get a complete understating of the event.³³

Publicity does not end with the event itself. For instance, a news article about the event or the charitable donation allows the public to reflect positively on what happened. Many stations air television coverage of events the day after as a form of recap or evaluation. Not only does this reinforce the good feelings of those who attended, but suggests to those who did not attend that they missed out. This constitutes the first piece of publicity for next year's event - the seed has been planted.

³³ *Media Alert*. Retrieved March 23, 2009, from <https://www.media-alert.com/what.aspx>

Significance:

My Capstone project represents more than just an academic undertaking. ***GO GREEN-EAT SLOW*** is an initiative that stands for the importance of “going green” through a convergence of different groups. I have gained a great deal of knowledge and experience in the field of public relations in the classroom and through internships and field research. But the most exciting aspect of my Capstone project was being able to apply what I had learned and implement something real and effective on the campus and positive for the community. Aside from good attendance for the benefit of the food bank, I hope for ***GO GREEN-EAT SLOW*** to be more than just another part of the environmental trend. I aspire for it to be something new and innovative that brings people together who share a sincere concern and interest in something of timely significance. The blueprint for ***GO GREEN-EAT SLOW*** now exists and waits for someone else to implement next year, and maybe for years to come.

