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STIR

Alyssa Di Rienzo

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STIR

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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May 2014

Honors Capstone Project in Marketing and Media

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Date: June 19th 2014

Abstract

The Syracuse University student body is overflowing with brilliance. Over the course of their four years on campus, many Syracuse students engage in truly amazing academic initiatives. Currently, there is no single resource that captures the stories and accomplishments of the university's most talented students. I have set out to address this opportunity, by creating a website that celebrates and shares the stories of the Syracuse University students.

I have created *STIR*, an online resource featuring video testimonials from outstanding Syracuse University students. The website has four main missions. First, to *share* the stories of Syracuse University talent with a larger audience, second to *transform* thinking on campus to foster ambition and motivation. A third goal of the site is to *inspire* other members of the Syracuse University community to pursue impressive undertakings. Finally, the resource will *recognize* the achievements and hard work of these individuals, something that is too done far too infrequently across disciplines. These four verbs not only represent the purpose of the website, but also form the name as well: S.T.I.R.

STIR can be accessed at the url <http://stiratsyracuse.wordpress.com>

It is my hope that sharing these stories, transforming thinking, inspiring others, and recognizing outstanding student accomplishments, will foster heightened ambition and to instill confidence among Syracuse University students.

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Executive Summary

My project will exist as an online resource featuring unique, innovative, and impressive work produced by Syracuse University students and graduate students. This site will grant members of the Syracuse community the ability to quickly learn about the outstanding work being done on and off campus.

The site, <http://stiratsyracuse.wordpress.com>, will feature promotional videos of a selection of Syracuse University students to inform, excite and inspire other SU students, prospective SU students, and other members of the community. In the videos, the students will briefly describe their sources of inspiration, how they began working on their specific project, description of their product, and finally recommendations and advice for prospective and current students. It is my hope that this resource will cause a “stir” in other students, prompting them to take advantage of the abundant resources Syracuse University has to offer, so that they too will be able to follow their passions and explore their interests during their time on campus.

With the incredible growth of digital and social technologies, it is now possible to spread information to a larger audience more easily. It was important for me to utilize technology to help me create and distribute this project. The site is built using Wordpress, a web software designed to host user created websites and blogs. Social media marketing will also be an important component during the distribution phase of the project.

As a Television, Radio, Film senior in Newhouse, I understand the power of a viral video. I firmly believe that stories are most effectively communicated through video. This is why I chose to develop my project as a video testimonial series.

I spoke to my peers, professors and on campus organizations to find hard-working students pursuing ambitious goals here at Syracuse University. I was able to quickly compile a list of names and contact information. I then contacted each personally individually and set up a preliminary meeting and interview where I learned more about the student and the project. By conducting these interviews, I was able to get a better idea of who would be a good fit for the videos. To make my final selection, I considered the type and status of the project, and how the student would perform in front of a camera. I also aimed to recruit candidates from diverse backgrounds, different class standing, and most importantly, different schools on campus to ensure the equal representation.

After this work was completed, I conducted and filmed a one-on-one interview with each student, then edited this content to create a short video to feature on the website.

Syracuse University students continually produce some of the most interesting, thoughtful and impressive work in the country. The unfortunate reality of this is that a majority of these projects are not accessible to the full Syracuse University

community. Many of these projects are only viewed by a select group of individuals. These accomplishments need to be celebrated, and should be available to all members of the Syracuse University community. My project will help these outstanding projects receive the recognition and promotion they deserve.

This website will serve as strong representation of Syracuse University talent. I hope that this project will have lasting significance on campus. I have been working closely with Andy Robinson, manager of the on campus Orange Television Network to discuss the possibility of OTN adopting and managing this resource in the future. Long term maintenance of the website will guarantee the Syracuse University community a wealth of documentation of valuable student work. With the addition of new student spotlight videos every year, this resource will have a lasting significance on campus, and could develop into a prominent resource on campus for students to learn more about the outstanding work being created in the Syracuse University community.

Acknowledgements

STIR features video testimonials from many bright, accomplished students whose participation was a critical component to the success of this project. I would like to sincerely thank and acknowledge each of the individuals who sacrificed their valuable time to be a part of this initiative. Thank you to Aidan Cunniffe, Serge Efad, Ian Dickerson, Sarah Roche, Kean Clifford, Allison Roberts, and Harsha Royuru for their involvement in this project.

Andy Robinson, my Capstone adviser and now good friend deserves endless praise for his involvement in this project. Andy was a source of invaluable assistance, inspiration, and reassurance. I truly appreciate all of the support and assistance he provided me during this year long process.

Also, a big thank you to Susan Smith for her valuable input and support during this process. Professor Smith's creativity, marketing expertise and sincere encouragement helped me tremendously.

I would also like to acknowledge Eric Holzworth, my honors advisor for all of his guidance during this process. Eric's mentorship was invaluable, and I truly appreciate all of his support.

I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to work with all of these incredibly talented individuals. Thank you to all who helped.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Opportunity:

My Honors Capstone project aimed to address some significant issues on campus. I firmly believe Syracuse University has one of the most talented student bodies in the country. Unfortunately, many of these students suffer from a lack of inspiration. It is typical for college students to turn to their peers for advice and inspiration, therefore I concluded that one way to motivate students would be to expose them to their successful peers. I wondered why there was not a space online where students could learn more about each other's academic accomplishments.

There are 10 distinct schools that form Syracuse University. These include the School of Architecture, the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Education, the School of Information Studies, among others. The unfortunate reality is that it is rare for these schools to interact and share student achievement. For example, the students in the S.I. Newhouse School are almost completely uninformed of the work being done in the L.C. Smith School of Engineering. Similarly, the exceptional art work created as part of many VPA programs, is never shown to most Martin J. Whitman students. Also, incredible Honors Capstone projects created by the honors seniors every year, are limited to the honors program or close friends. I saw the opportunity to share student projects

as an important issue that needed to be addressed, and aimed to help it through my Honors Capstone project.

Syracuse University has an overwhelming amount of valuable resources, which in my experience are underutilized. Far too many students are unaware of the resources that this University offers, such as the 3D printers in Kimmel, or the various businesses plan competitions that fund student start ups. These resources are at their disposal during their limited time on campus, and I saw a need to preserve and promote these opportunities for students. I believed the best way encourage students to take advantage of these opportunities would be for them to be encouraged by their peers to do so.

The Project:

With my Honors Capstone project I aimed to address these problems on campus. I wanted to create an online resource that focused solely on telling the stories of successful SU students. I wanted to find and document some of the ingenuity, innovation and creativity on this campus, while simultaneously inspiring other students to pursue their own academic interests. To determine the most effective way to do this I began talking to some of the people on campus that I found most interesting. I immediately noticed their passion and excitement when they began speaking about the different projects they were working on. Their enthusiasm made an impact on me, and it was at this moment I knew I that I had to share these stories. I wondered, if these students could have such positive effect on me, who knows who else on campus may be influenced. I saw the opportunity to create an online video series of these students, to share with the

rest of the campus. I saw this as a solution to the problems I previously identified. I set out to create a website full of interesting student testimonial videos to inspire other students to pursue their own academic interests. This website needed to include students from all of the different programs on campus to allow students to be exposed to outstanding student work created in all the different schools on campus. This would promote increased communication between the schools, helping to bring students in different academic disciplines together.

The Purpose:

This video series serves many purposes, but is primarily intended to promote inspiration and motivation in students. The student success stories featured in the videos should prove to students that hard work during their time at Syracuse University will pay off. I wanted to create something that students can turn to when they are discouraged academically. The site should also spark conversations and ideas for viewers. I hope students will recognize the energy, passion and drive of the students in the videos and be inspired to pursue their own academic interests and take advantage of the immense opportunities available to them at Syracuse University.

The project also is a strong promotional piece for the University as a whole. This resource highlights top students at the University and showcases their many accomplishments. Each video also includes a segment about how Syracuse University directly contributed to the development of their ideas. The students cited the many Syracuse University resources, faculty, and coursework that helped them get to where they are today. This natural promotion highlights

the strength of the university, while simultaneously urging other students to consider coming to the university.

Chapter 2

The Audience

STIR is aimed at a broad audience, as all members of the Syracuse University community could benefit from exposure to these stories. The main audience that I was trying to appeal to was current and prospective Syracuse University students, with a specific focus on incoming Syracuse University freshman. Each video testimonial includes recommendations and suggestions that would be valuable for anyone entering college. The videos would be most beneficially to someone early on in their academic career because they would still have time to adopt the recommendations presented in the videos. Older students, especially those already considering a significant academic undertaking, in need of some sort of “push” would also benefit from visiting this website.

University career centers could use these videos to broadcast not only to prospective students but also to industry recruiters. A website showcasing Syracuse University’s top talent would have a tremendous impact on recruiters, showing them directly the type of students they could hire if they recruited at Syracuse University. Other University development offices could show the site to alumni to further their efforts to towards donations. Alumni could see the types of achievement their donations can foster, making them more likely to donate money to the school.

These videos also directly benefit any faculty or staff members associated with the students featured in the videos. This would give them the recognition they deserve, and give other students the opportunity to contact the faculty member if they are interested in their area of expertise. Also, any organizations or clubs that the students are in would get added exposure and promotion. While this website is aimed specifically at SU students, it is evident that multiple parties could benefit from its creation.

Chapter 3

Creative Choices

Inspiration:

I have been fascinated by TEDTalks for quite some time, and I believe that these talks influenced the production of the videos I created for my project. TEDTalks simplistically educate, excite, and inspire audiences by capturing an interesting individual with a captivating message. In every TEDTalk, the speaker's story effortlessly captures the audience's attention. Each video has a similar look, which contributes to brand recognition and allows for all of the videos to feel unified. Also, all speakers at TED are expected to keep their performances short, as almost every TEDTalk falls under 20 minutes.

I wanted to structure my videos in a similar way, one that would limit distractions and allow the audience to concentrate on the specific narrative of each student. I applied the visual techniques I saw in TEDTalks into my video series. I shot each interview on a green screen so that I could create a uniform

background for all the videos. Each interview features close up shots of the students speaking to an off camera interviewer. I hoped this would create intimacy between the student and the viewer. I wanted to communicate that these students are our peers, so I kept the interviews very informal and conversational. I wanted the audience to feel as though they were talking to a friend while they were watching the videos.

Talent Selection:

I based my talent selection off a few important factors. First, I examined the project they were working on for uniqueness and strength. If the student seemed like they would have an interesting story to share, I met with them for a preliminary interview to determine if they would work well on camera. I screened the candidates for energy and enthusiasm, knowledge of their subject matter, and likeability. I needed the students to be friendly, so that other students would welcome their advice. I aimed to include diverse individuals that represented all schools, and different class standings. I wanted every viewer to feel like they could relate to the individuals featured, therefore it was important to select candidates that were different from one another. These criteria allowed me to narrow my list of possible interviews down to 10. I then conducted these interviews, and selected the strongest ones for inclusion on the website.

Name and Logo:

It was important for me to select a name that communicated the purpose and mission of the website, but in a way that was not obvious. I needed to create a brand that that would appeal to the college age demographic. After several

weeks of brainstorming, I came up with the name “stir.” I thought it was represented the mission in a fun and captivating way. I worked closely with my Honors Reader, a professor of marketing practice at the Whitman School of Management, to further develop the brand. We decided that the name needed to be more meaningful. We reworked the name to have each letter stand for something, allowing it to evolve to *STIR: Share, Transform, Inspire, Recognize*. This name describes the meaning of my project in a catchy way. Additionally, stir means to incite, instigate or prompt which further represents the mission of the site. I also liked how the verb is associated with motion, as it symbolizes the combination of people, ideas and resources.

I worked closely with my roommate who is a graphic designer to craft a logo for the site. The logo was an important aspect of the project as it would help to visually shape the brand. I wanted the logo to be simple, yet eye catching. The name “stir” is the focus, and it is orange to represent Syracuse University. The shade of orange is not the standard SU orange, but a shade lighter. I choose to slightly diverge from the conventional Syracuse University color to give my brand its own distinct identity. Next to the name is a swirl design to visually represent the idea of stirring. At the base of the logo, we included the words that each letter stands for to communicate additional meaning with the logo. These elements are in a teal blue, again deviating from the traditional colors, but still related to the Syracuse blue.

Structure:

Each video is structured in the same way. The video opens with the student introducing themselves, and what school they are in at Syracuse University. They then make a declarative statement about the impact they have made in their particular field. This statement serves as the hook that captures viewer's attention drawing them into the rest of the video. Then, I decided to fade into a montage of images that represent Syracuse University, and then into the logo. This helped me to add uniformity to each video, allowing the videos to come together to form one cohesive video series. The opening features quick cuts set to fast- paced music, which helps to build excitement and intrigue, in an attempt to keep viewers interested.

Length was an importance consideration for me as well. Keeping the target audience in mind, I knew that the videos needed to be short. Research suggests that students respond more positively to online content that can communicate value quickly. I determined that each video testimonial should have a duration around three to five minutes.

Originally, I planned to overlay B-roll footage over the interviews in order to help with the flow of the videos. After acquiring some footage and working it into the videos, I made the creative decision to leave out any B-roll. I felt as though the addition of the B-roll footage made the interviews less intimate.

Music:

I selected music that I thought would add energy and life to the videos. Any background music needed to fit with the positive, inspirational tone set by the

interviews. I wanted to select tracks fit the pacing of the clips as well. I searched through an online database of royalty free music in order to find songs to fit these criteria. I narrowed my search down to a few different songs and then selected two tracks that best fit the tone of the interviews.

Chapter 4

Obstacles and Challenges

Getting Started:

One of the most difficult parts of the Honors Capstone process was getting started. I went abroad in the fall of 2012 and therefore did not begin my capstone process until the spring of my junior year. I began the capstone program with no ideas and little inspiration. I spent the majority of the spring brainstorming possible ideas for project ideas. I worked with a few professors in Newhouse to try to find something that inspired me. This is when I first saw the opportunity to create something for students in a similar situation. After finalizing the idea, I became extremely overwhelmed and made progress very slowly. My project specifically required a lot of coordination with people I did not previously know. I had to schedule meetings, phone interviews, and information settings with people all over campus. My idea required several rounds of reworking, which was not only discouraging but also taxing.

Working Remotely:

During the fall of 2013, I left campus and took part in the Syracuse University Los Angeles semester. I completely underestimated how difficult would be to gain traction from halfway across the country. I naively assumed that I could continue my organization and coordination utilizing email and video chat. The realization that this was much more difficult than I originally anticipated, allowed me to draw an important conclusion. While technology can help, nothing really replaces face to face communication. Something that I could accomplish in one or two days on campus, would takes weeks of back and forth email. I screened some candidates for the videos over Skype, and learned that I could not truly meet someone over a screen. This understanding helped me to realize the importance of physical presence in relationship building. My project required me to deal with people, and this is something not easily accomplished with the use of technology alone. My time in Los Angeles was valuable in many ways. I learned more about video production and editing, and employed my new skills when creating the videos. I used the majority of my time in Los Angeles to develop my original idea, and to prepare for the production aspects in the spring semester. My organization and preparation allowed me to start working immediately when I returned to campus in January.

Unexpected Setbacks:

I learned many things while completing my Honors Capstone project, but one of the most important things this process taught me was how to deal with

unexpected setbacks. During this experience, I learned that even with careful planning, obstacles will occur, and the best thing to do is to work through them. During this process, unforeseen scheduling conflicts arose, camera troubles affected the interview shoots, and technical issues slowed down the video editing process. Less than once month before the Honors Capstone project was due, my apartment was broken into. My laptop and hard drive containing all of my project media and information was unfortunately stolen. I lost almost everything, and panicked. I contacted my honors advisor and capstone advisor, and thanks to their empathy and overwhelming support, we reworked some things and developed a plan to complete the project. I unfortunately needed to start many aspects of the project over, but was able to redo my work quicker than I expected. I now backup my files extensively, in order to prevent a situation like this from occurring the future. Overall, from this experience I learned how to be more resilient and how to persevere in times of hardship.

Chapter 7

The Future of The Project

OTN Adoption

In order to make a lasting impact on campus, I knew that this website would have to be grown and maintained in future academic years. As I was working on this project, I contemplated how I could ensure the site's future maintenance.

I worked with Andy Robinson, manager of the Orange Television Network, to develop this project. The Orange Television Network (OTN) features content targeted to students, created by student producers. While working on this specific honors project, we both noticed that the missions of both my online resource *STIR*, and OTN were very similar. OTN and *STIR* both tell the stories of students at Syracuse University. We discussed the possibility of OTN adopting the site, to allow for future growth. Professor Robinson explained how this marriage made sense, as the TV industry has now morphed into a multi-platform communication system. OTN needed a greater web presence, and *STIR* could drive more internet traffic. It was a natural fit, as OTN had the resources to film, and edit more video interviews in the future. The team at OTN could develop this resource further in the future to increase its influence on campus. My Honors Capstone project would serve as the template for a new OTN initiative. I worked with Professor Robinson to create a plan that would allow for OTN to be responsible for future maintenance of *STIR*. We outlined a potential plan, in which OTN would hire a student next semester that would agree to continue to produce the student testimonial videos. This producer would be expected to create two to three videos a semester to continue to build the site. Professor Robinson expressed interest in working alongside the Honors Program at Syracuse to identify student talent. I have agreed to continue to work with Professor Robinson in the future to ensure that this consolidation can occur. I feel confident passing this idea on to OTN as the network sets high standards for

professional production and storytelling excellence. OTN's commitment to serve students will help to grow and support this website.

This merger also makes sense as OTN has an established audience and strong brand recognition on campus. This will lead to increased exposure and promotion for the website as well. I trust that Professor Robinson and his team will be dedicated to the advancement of this idea. I am excited to see how this idea can grow if maintained through OTN. OTN could also handle the marketing efforts next semester, and properly launch the site.

The initial launch of the site is slated for early fall. It was important for the launch date to align with the start of the academic calendar, as this is a time where students are beginning new academic initiatives and therefore would benefit from viewing a resource like this. Also, the beginning of the year is a time where students are more open to trying new things, and meeting new people, this is another reason why a fall launch for the site is appropriate. Finally, a beginning of the semester launch would give interested students the ability to enroll in certain classes that appeal to any new interests kindled by the student testimonials.

Targeted on campus and social media promotion will be key for allowing the resource to take hold and serve its intended purpose. I believe the site will benefit from associated Facebook and Twitter pages. This will allow for students to interact with the brand and to share the content with other students on campus.

Chapter 6

Lessons Learned

I firmly believe that I learned many valuable lessons by completing this Honors Capstone project. Firstly, this process greatly improved my interviewing skills. Before beginning this undertaking, I thought I understood how to properly interview individuals. I has some experience interviewing in the past in some of my Newhouse classes and during some of my internships. My capstone advisor sat in with me during some of the earlier interviews and provided me thoughtful feedback. I learned how to make the interview conversational, but still valuable. I got better at asking appropriate follow up questions, which helped greatly facilitated the sharing of information. I quickly grasped the techniques that not only made the interviewee more comfortable, but also aided in the information gathering process. After completing all the interview for my Honors Capstone project, it was evident that I had greatly developed my interviewing skills.

The process of editing together the testimonials helped me to greatly improve my post production abilities. I used Final Cut Pro X to cut the videos. In order to effectively do so, I needed to know Final Cut very well. I shot all of the interviews on a green screen, which means I also needed to add in a background and properly key the video. As I began to edit the footage, I noticed I had some lighting issues. I incorrectly white balanced the camera for some of the interviews which resulted in severe discoloration. I soon realized I would need to

use the color correction feature on Final Cut Pro, a feature that I had no previous experience with. This turned out to be the most time consuming part of the editing process. I watched numerous online tutorials and worked with the Apple Genius Bar to improve my color correction abilities. Now, color correction on Final Cut Pro is a skill I can confidently use in the future.

This project has allowed me to grow both academically professionally, and socially. It has helped to impact my thinking in a positive way, and I hope it will affect others in a similar way. I hope to see this website grow into a resource rich with content. My Honors Capstone project exists as the template for what could be a website overflowing with outstanding student talent, and I look forward to its future success.

Appendix

Interview Questions:

1. What is your name, age and home college?
2. Where are you from? What do your parents do?
3. What are you studying at Syracuse?
4. Please describe the project you are involved in at Syracuse University.
5. What inspired you to get started on this?
6. What potential societal impact do you think this project will have?
7. How do you think your time at Syracuse University contributed to the development of this idea?
8. What Syracuse University Resources have you taken advantage of when implementing
9. Why is it important for other Syracuse University to know about this project?
10. What is your advice for other Syracuse students that want to get started on their own idea?
11. Do you plan to continue this project / research / company after you graduate?
12. What advice do you have for other students that want to pursue an idea?

General question set used during the student interviews



STIR Logo