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# The Development and Implementation of a Student Rewards System

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THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A  
STUDENT REWARDS SYSTEM

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Science with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

Jon E. Warren

\*\*\*\*\*

Western Kentucky University

2015

CE/T Committee:

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2015

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to learn of the inner workings of an intercollegiate athletics department and the process for creating a successful marketing plan. Gaining these experiences as a young sport management professional is crucial to job placement and advancement in the sport industry. From the initial idea generation through the first season of operation, I served as creator and the primary administrator of the WKU Red Wave: The Official Student Group of WKU Athletics. The duties for this project included marketing plan development and implementation through the facets of social media marketing, personal selling, and other intercollegiate athletics marketing concepts. The project started in January of 2013 and concluded in May of 2014, beginning with research on other student groups at various NCAA Division I benchmark institutions. Funding to start the group was provided by the Honors College and WKU Student Government Association. Creating a sustainable and reputable product and brand was a goal in this project that was seemingly successful as the student group is still in existence today. By working directly with WKU Athletics Marketing and other athletic administration professionals, I was able to take learning outside the classroom and into a real-life setting.

**Keywords:** WKU Red Wave, WKU Athletics, Sports Marketing, Intercollegiate Athletics, Social Media Marketing, Brand Development

Dedicated to my father who I never got the privilege to know well but has motivated me to be the best that I can be and to my mother who has always encouraged me to reach for the stars.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all of my professors that have had such a positive influence on my academic career. Those professors include, but are not limited to: Dr. Paula Upright, Dr. Joanna Phillips Melancon, Dr. Tricia Jordan, Dr. Darren Smith, Mr. Jimmy Cottrell, Mr. Chris Derry, and Dr. Evie Oregon. Thank you for your instruction and motivation to strive for greatness.

The WKU Athletics Department is one of the best in the NCAA and that is partially because of the great staff that has served as mentors to me in my time at Western Kentucky University. Special thanks goes out to Thomas Harris, Zack McKay, Lindsay Boyden, Matt Morrison, Grant Stepp, Jamie Levitt, Andy Bean, Jonathan Cosby, and Todd Stewart for your mentorship that has helped me grow dramatically over my time with WKU Athletics.

Thank you to the WKU Honors College and WKU Student Government Association for providing funding for this endeavor and for your contributions to creating a better fan experience for the students of Western Kentucky University.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my family and friends for creating a great circle of support for me to follow my dreams and work towards a project like this.

## VITA

December 26, 1993.....	Born – Owensboro, KY
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2012.....	Hancock County High School, Lewisport, KY  Carol Martin Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science in Kentucky, Bowling Green, KY
2013-2014.....	President, WKU Red Wave
2014.....	Assistant Director of Marketing and Sales, Ohio University Athletics

## FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Sport Management

Minor Field: Business Administration

Minor Field: Marketing

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The roar of a crowd is something that all athletes strive to hear as they perform on their respective field of play. The student-athletes at Western Kentucky University are no different. When the teams emerge from their respective locker rooms and out on to their field of play at WKU, the noise is staggering, depending on many factors. In some games, the noise caused by fans is overwhelmingly loud and can insert a bit of confidence into the Hilltopper student-athletes, but in other games, the noise is almost non-existent due to the lack of student attendance at the event. This inconsistency, along with many other factors led to this Honors Capstone Experience/Thesis.

When I was a freshman, the WKU Athletics Marketing Department had a program called “Code Red: The Official Student Group of WKU Athletics”. This free program allowed for students to receive a free branded t-shirt and “Red Towel” (while supplies lasted). Students in Code Red were also signed up for an email mailing list that provided them with reminders on game times and invites to exclusive events. This program was a hit with students and student-athletes as it provided a chance for students to receive free merchandise and student-athletes saw an increase in student attendance at their events. Unfortunately, Code Red was discontinued

due to lack of funding by WKU Athletics the next year. The model was not profitable due to the free nature of the program and that the program didn't generate as many sponsorships through IMG College, the multimedia and sponsorship rights holder for the athletics department.



**Figure 1.1: The logo of WKU Code Red: The Official Student Group of WKU Athletics (2010-2011)**

With the departure of Code Red, a hole was left in the WKU Athletics Department. Communication and marketing with students could still take place in forms of campus-wide emails, social media, and on-campus person-to-person marketing. This model stayed for approximately one academic year.

This WKU Honors College Capstone Experience/Thesis project took place over a period of a year-and-a-half (from January 2013 – July 2014). The planning began in January 2013 when I approached Thomas Harris, Assistant Director of Marketing for the Western Kentucky University Department of Intercollegiate Athletics about my idea to

revive and evolve the previous model. He informed me of the successes and problems with the previous model used with Code Red, and we discussed that much market research should be done to determine if this was a feasible idea.

## CHAPTER 2

### MARKETING RESEARCH

The feasibility research done to establish credibility for this project was done in a variety of ways. A simple search of other schools participating in student rewards/student attendance programs retrieved valuable results across NCAA Division I conferences. A trip was scheduled to visit a prominent school with a thriving student engagement program and fan-base. Students at Western Kentucky University were surveyed as well. These tools would deem powerful in determining that a student engagement and attendance rewards system was necessary.

The programs that emerged through the internet searches would serve as a primary source in the development of the WKU Red Wave. Varying results came from these searches. From schools that charged larger amount for memberships to a free membership, the results were very eye-opening. There was no standard in student attendance programs. As is typical in sports marketing, selecting parts of plans from other schools that would seemingly work in your own environment and adapting them to your program is what needed to be done. For example, giving a car away like some

Southeastern Conference schools may pursue would not be even close to feasible at Western Kentucky University. However, a prize drawing every month like some other similar sized schools performed would definitely be feasible. Even a grand prize such as a \$500 gift card was feasible. Knowing your current standings such as budget, fan expectation, and sponsorship fulfillment are very important in establishing a program such as this.

After the research was done, Butler University in Indianapolis, IN was selected as a school that was very intriguing to the WKU marketing staff and me. Butler came into national prominence after their two NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament runs in 2010 and 2011. These semi-finals appearances gave Butler the fan base that many schools can only dream of. The Dawg Pound is the name of the student reward program at Butler University. The Dawg Pound is also known to be a very intimidating student section and efficient rewards system according to their athletics website. Contact was made with Lindsay Martin, Manager of Sports Marketing with Butler University Athletics to arrange a visit. Ms. Martin works with the Dawg Pound as the staff advisor. In her role, she works on procurement of promotional items, membership sales, membership point management, and event coordination.

A trip was set to Indianapolis for the Tuesday, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013 Butler Men's Basketball game vs. Duquesne. I traveled to Indianapolis with a fellow athletics marketing intern to meet with Ms. Martin and to discuss her ideas on her program. We were able to arrive at Hinkle Fieldhouse a couple of hours prior to tipoff and were able to see how the event was managed and what special events were done for students at Butler University. Ms. Martin and her intern were able to describe their plans that worked with

the Dawg Pound. The point management system was a web-based platform that tracked students on their attendance and published the standings on the Internet. Student attendance was recorded via barcode scanner at the entrance. Exclusive seating in the lower end zones were reserved for Dawg Pound members who arrived earliest and received a wristband for admission, thus, students were lined up outside over one hour before gates opened 90 minutes prior to tipoff. This dedication was remarkable to us as WKU students are normally late arrivers to games rather than what we were seeing at Butler. The in-game student fan experience was also very well coordinated. Students from the Dawg Pound were selected for engaging in-game promotions such as a toy car race and a half-court shot. A student from the Dawg Pound was also selected to participate in the pre-game ceremony where the live bulldog mascot would receive a bone from the participant. During the game, students led chants that seemed to surround the entire arena. This engagement and interaction of the students was remarkable and definitely made Hinkle Fieldhouse an intimidating environment for the visiting team. What was even more notable was the fact that the game was against a fairly poor quality opponent and the game was on a weeknight where it was notoriously lower attended.

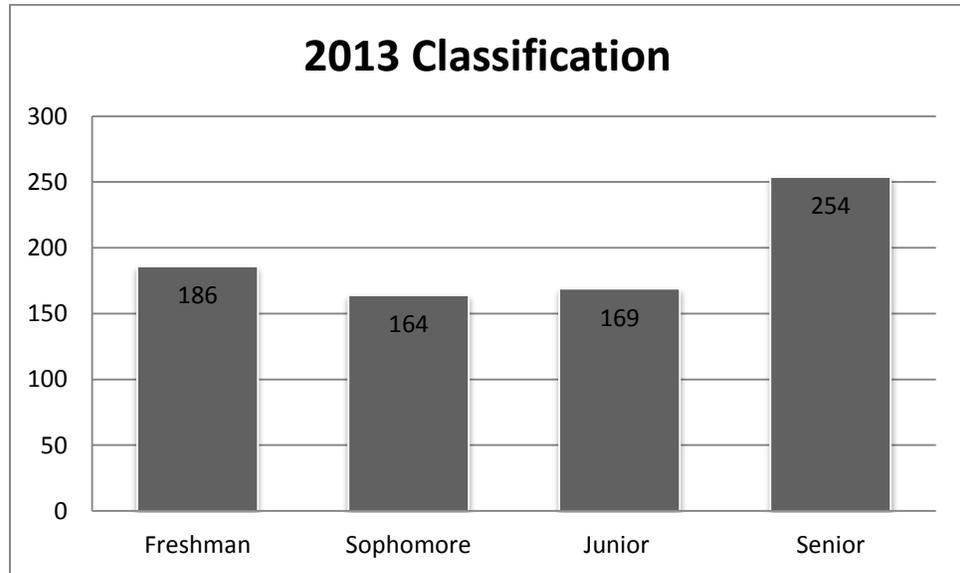
Postgame, we were able to meet Brad Stevens, who, at the time, was the Head Coach of Butler University Men's Basketball. Stevens informed us that the crowd can have a great effect on his team's performance and even determine if the team wins or loses. Hearing that from a coach who is one of the best coaches in basketball was a great reinforcement of what I already believed. WKU Athletics needed to engage their students in a more efficient manner.

The trip to Butler was not all the marketing research that was done, however. A survey was developed and published on the official athletics webpage: [wkusports.com](http://wkusports.com). This survey was promoted via social media and on the main page of [wkusports.com](http://wkusports.com). One lucky student was rewarded with a \$50 gift card to the WKU Store for their input. Students were asked the following questions:

1. Entering fall 2013 what will be your classification at WKU?
2. For the 2013-14 academic year will you be living on or off campus?
3. During the 2012-13 athletic seasons how many WKU athletic events did you attend?
4. If WKU Athletics began offering a student club with exclusive meet and greets with coaches, priority to purchase post seasons tickets to include NCAA Tournament games and Bowl games, free gear, student bus trips and various rewards throughout the season, how much would you be willing pay for membership?
5. What is your primary source of WKU Athletics news, including updates, game times, feature content and scores?
6. Please enter your WKU student email for a chance to win a \$50.00 shopping spree to the WKU Store.
7. Students were then required to enter a Captcha code to ensure that the responses were credible and not being submitted by a computer program rather than an actual human.

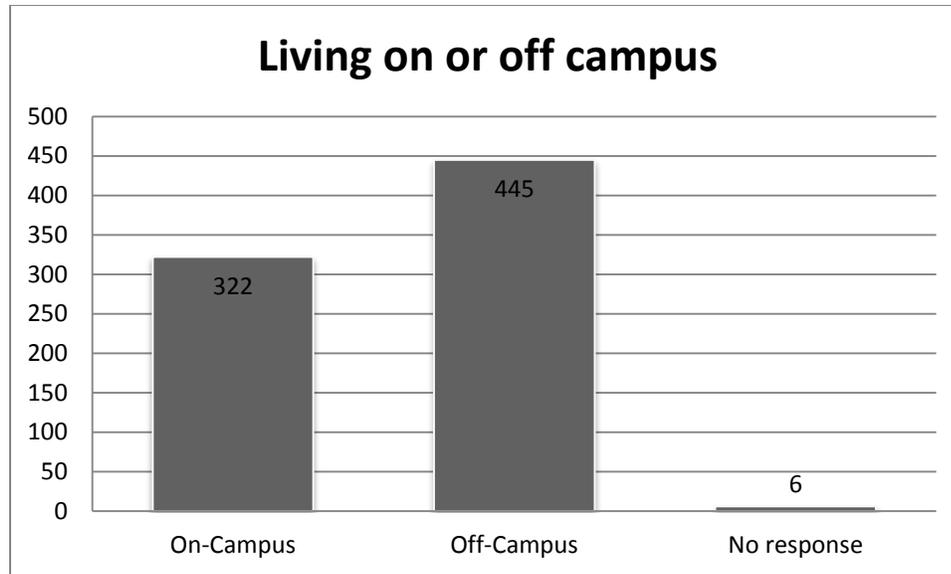
The response for the survey rendered a good sample of the student body at WKU. Altogether, 773 survey responses were completed. The following figures provide a

summary for the survey. For privacy reasons, no identifying responses will be published in this piece.



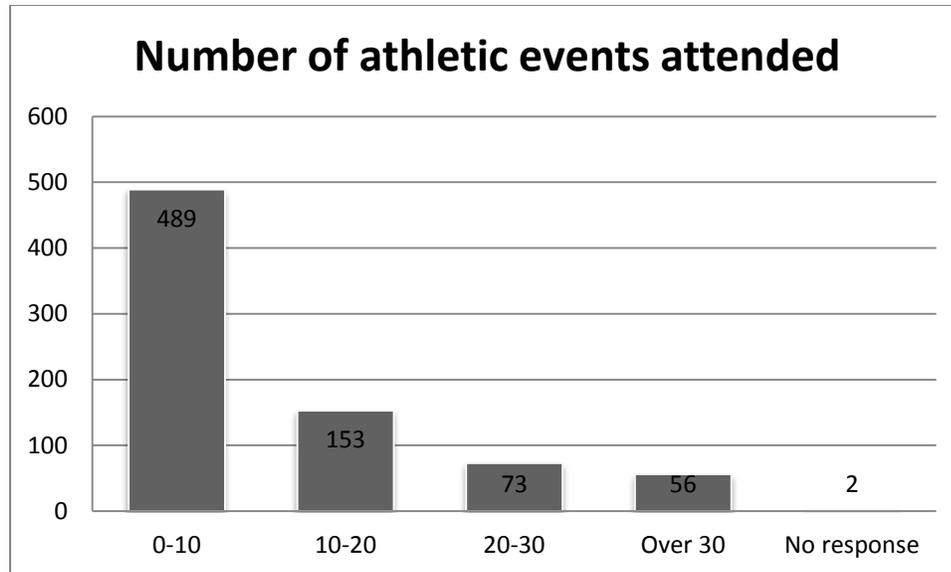
**Figure 2.1: Classification for the 2013 academic year for survey responders**

As can be seen in Figure 2.1, the responses of the students that participated in the survey to gauge interest for a potential student rewards system was spread fairly evenly across the student body. Each classification was represented in the sample, thus giving us a very good view of what the student body thought about the potential of a student rewards system.



**Figure 2.2: Living arrangements for student survey responders**

As seen in Figure 2.2, a majority of the survey responders lived off-campus. Students who live on-campus typically are able to attend a WKU athletic event more easily due to proximity to athletic venue, parking, and other factors compared to students who live off-campus. Having both populations represented allowed for us to see how each population feels about our events and their attendance at said events.



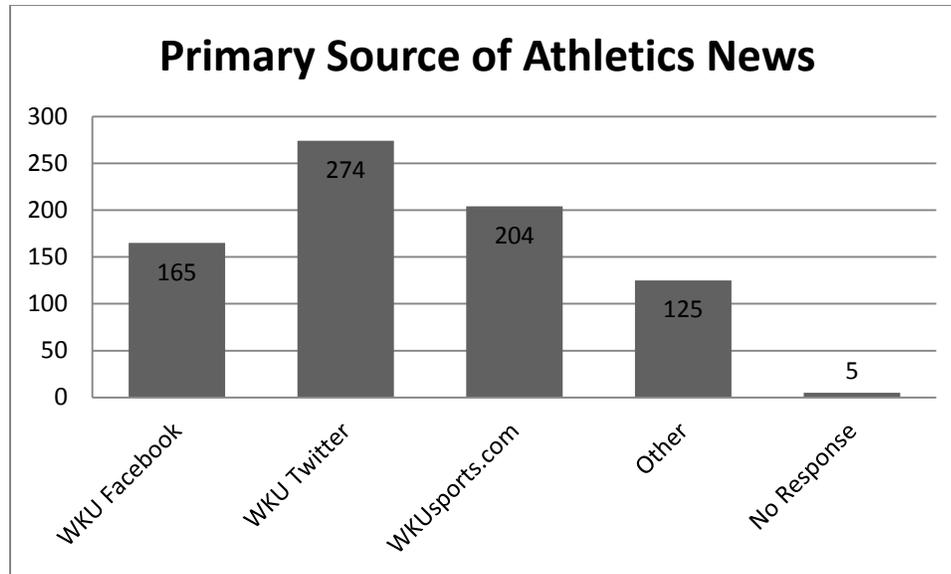
**Figure 2.3: Number of athletic events attended in the previous academic year by the survey responders**

This response that was the most telling about the necessity of a student attendance rewards system. Results showing a majority of students attended ten or less events out of the close to 100 events held on campus each year was concerning especially as an aspiring sports marketing professional. One of the main goals of an intercollegiate athletics marketing department is to engage the students to encourage attendance at home athletics events. This can always be improved at any school regardless of reputation or size, and WKU is no exception.



**Figure 2.4: Amount that student survey responders stated that they were willing to pay for membership to the student rewards system**

The need for a student rewards system was already established by the lack of attendance by students at home athletic events. Seeing the statistics that a majority of the students surveyed were willing to pay for a student rewards system was another step in the right direction for this new initiative. Determining the pricing strategy is something that you can't take lightly in the unveiling of a new product or service, and this was no different. This data set would prove very useful in setting said pricing strategy.



**Figure 2.5: How students surveyed receive information concerning WKU Athletics and events that are taking place**

Information concerning how fans receive information about events and news about WKU Athletics is very important. It can allow for new directives to be created and for some to be discontinued. It can also tell athletics marketing and communications professionals which methods are currently working best and what the trends in information communication are popular. In this case, it was evident that the popular social media platforms Facebook and Twitter and WKUSports.com were the most effective in relaying information to students. Other responses included the local newspaper, other non-official WKU social media accounts, and word of mouth. This data would come into use in the planning and initial unveiling of the student rewards program.

The research that was done in advance of the unveiling of the new student rewards system at Western Kentucky University would prove to be very useful in the creation of the marketing plan for the initiative. This plan would reflect many of the ideas

generated from the site visit to Butler University, internet searches, and the survey results from students at WKU.

## CHAPTER 3

### MARKETING PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The marketing plan is a crucial piece in the development of a new initiative. The marketing plan serves as the primary planning document and as a roadmap of what needs to be accomplished. The plan lays out all of the goals and objectives for the project as well as the planning to accomplish those goals. It can outline advertising efforts, special events being held, and communications efforts for the project. The marketing plan is a living, breathing document, thus it is not supposed to stay as a final document, but as one that can be edited over time to adjust to the current situation.

Marketing plan development for this initiative began when the research and initial idea generation were started. Though pen may have not been put to paper until months later, the concepts discussed in the marketing plan were discussed from the beginning. The goals and objectives were set according to the overall target of the project: to increase attendance and engagement of students. There are multiple strategies when determining the contents of this section. One can set very aggressive goals and objectives, one can be very pessimistic in their goal-setting, or one can combine both of the prior strategies. In the development of the plan, we sought to be overarching with the goals and objectives. The next section of the marketing plan designated the expectations

for membership in the student rewards system and how a student could sign up. The program was exclusive to WKU students no matter the classification. Membership was set at \$10 which included the official t-shirt, membership card sticker, access to the rewards system, first priority to student post-season bowl or NCAA Tournament tickets, and access to exclusive events. Payment was accepted originally via cash or check only, but was extended to credit and debit cards with a partnership with the WKU Ticket Office.

The points system was what allowed for a student to be rewarded at particular events during the season. Each event was designated with a specific point value. Each WKU Men's and Women's Basketball event was worth two points and bonus games were set up throughout the year for WKU Volleyball, Football, Softball, Baseball, and key games for Men's and Women's Basketball. Rewards were set based on the number of points accumulated by a specific date. The rewards were entries into drawing for exclusive WKU team gear, gift cards to the WKU Store, and a shopping spree from Russell Athletic. The number of points that a student accumulated also directly affected their position in order of postseason ticket distribution.

Promotion of the new group was done in many ways. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were very important in spreading the message. The branding of the group was also a very important aspect as making a lasting impact on the prospective members and making the logo and name memorable were important for future success. In regards to print promotion, posters were created by the athletics marketing staff and produced by a local printing company. That poster can be seen in Figure 3.1.



**Figure 3.1: The promotional poster that we distributed and display around WKU’s campus in an effort to promote the WKU Red Wave**

This poster was placed around the campus of WKU and in all residence halls. It was also placed on WKUSports.com for prospective members to see.

Email advertising efforts were also crucial in the promotion of this initiative. Emails were sent by the marketing staff to other campus professionals. In addition, I was able to send an email informing the over 700 survey respondents of the WKU Red Wave and the opportunities that were available for the organization’s members. I was also able to utilize a connection with a professor in the sport management discipline to forward the information on to all students in the major. Copies of these emails can be seen in the appendix. Public address script reads were also developed for all home athletic events to

inform students and fans of the WKU Red Wave and the fact it was declared as the official student group of the athletics department.

The marketing plan also outlined the organizational structure of the group to show that it was in fact run by students with assistance by the WKU Athletics Marketing Department. With that being said, the students that were put in charge, myself primarily, needed to make public appearances on behalf of the Red Wave to promote the sales of memberships. Appearances were set up in some of my classes to discuss the Red Wave with sport management students. Additionally, presentations were made to fraternity and sorority leaders on campus on the benefits of the Red Wave. This led to some additional memberships purchased and thus more revenue in the budget for the organization and increased awareness and brand awareness of the WKU Red Wave.

## CHAPTER 4

### UNVEILING AND THE FIRST YEAR OF THE WKU RED WAVE

When planning for the WKU Red Wave began in January 2013, the plan was for the program to be unveiled during M.A.S.T.E.R. Plan. This week-long freshmen orientation program is hosted on the campus of Western Kentucky University the week before classes begin. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, the unveiling was pushed back. Since the freshmen could not be targeted as much as would have been liked, more preparation was allowed to ensure a successful unveiling. This unveiling was set for basketball season which begins in late October/early November.

All of the months of planning came down to the initial public reveal. The first event of the life of the WKU Red Wave was at the 2013 Hilltopper Hysteria event. Hilltopper Hysteria is the kickoff to basketball season for WKU Men's and Women's Basketball. The week prior to the event, cryptic tweets were produced to hint at the unveiling of the program. Complete with our new logo embroidered table cloth and new banner for the student section, we were open for business. At Hilltopper Hysteria, a table was placed directly by the student section to allow for visibility and accessibility for WKU students. Our table was approached by many students that evening. In all 22 students registered that

evening, generating over \$200 in revenue for the organization. It was the beginning of something special for WKU and WKU Athletics.

With the help of WKU Athletics administrators with access to the main social media accounts for the department, we were able to grow our @WKURedWave Twitter account followers. With our tweets about the organization in prospective students' feeds, it allowed for us to generate conversation and get information out to the student body. These conversations and information pieces proved successful in the initial weeks as we were able to communicate where and when signups were being held. Students who previously had no idea that we were doing signups in the student center were informed and came to the signup to receive their t-shirt and pay their dues.

Thankfully, in terms of building membership numbers, WKU's basketball seasons were still a couple weeks away when the Red Wave was unveiled. Membership recruitment at Hilltopper Hysteria was rather good for a previously unknown product. The real work was still to come in expanding the brand. The students that were the early adopters of the product became one of our best assets. The word-of-mouth communication between peers can be some of the most powerful words to a prospective customer. With our classroom presentations and Greek organization presentations still to come, we were looking forward to the opportunity to present this new offering to WKU students. The presentations were set up in classes in which I was enrolled in including sport management courses which, typically, contain students that are more likely to attend sporting events. The Greek community at WKU is one that is fairly large, but is not as engaged in the athletics community as we would have liked. Having the

opportunity to speak to the leaders of this portion of campus was much appreciated. Both groups were receptive to the ideas of the WKU Red Wave.

Email marketing was going to be a crucial part of the promotion of the Red Wave to ensure the most amount of signups before the season got underway. As mentioned before, a survey was issued by the department and placed on WKUSports.com and on the official social media pages of the department. The responses to this survey also served as a data capture of potential students that could become future members of the WKU Red Wave. This, in combination with other email marketing initiatives, was able to generate more brand awareness and allow for another exposure to the WKU Red Wave name and mission.

As time got closer to the first game, plans were made on how the season would play out. A new student entrance was established at Diddle Arena. Previously, students would enter through a gate in which normal, ticketed fans could enter. After discussions between WKU Athletics Marketing, Ticket Operations, and Facilities, the decision was made to make the ramp at Gate 1, the exclusive WKU Student Entrance to WKU Basketball events. This exclusive area allowed for Red Wave to set up each game to promote the organization and recruit new members. It also allowed for us to have almost a funnel effect on the student population, requiring them to walk past our table at each game that they attended. To learn more about the new student entrance that was set up in Diddle Arena, you can view this video that was created by the athletics department:

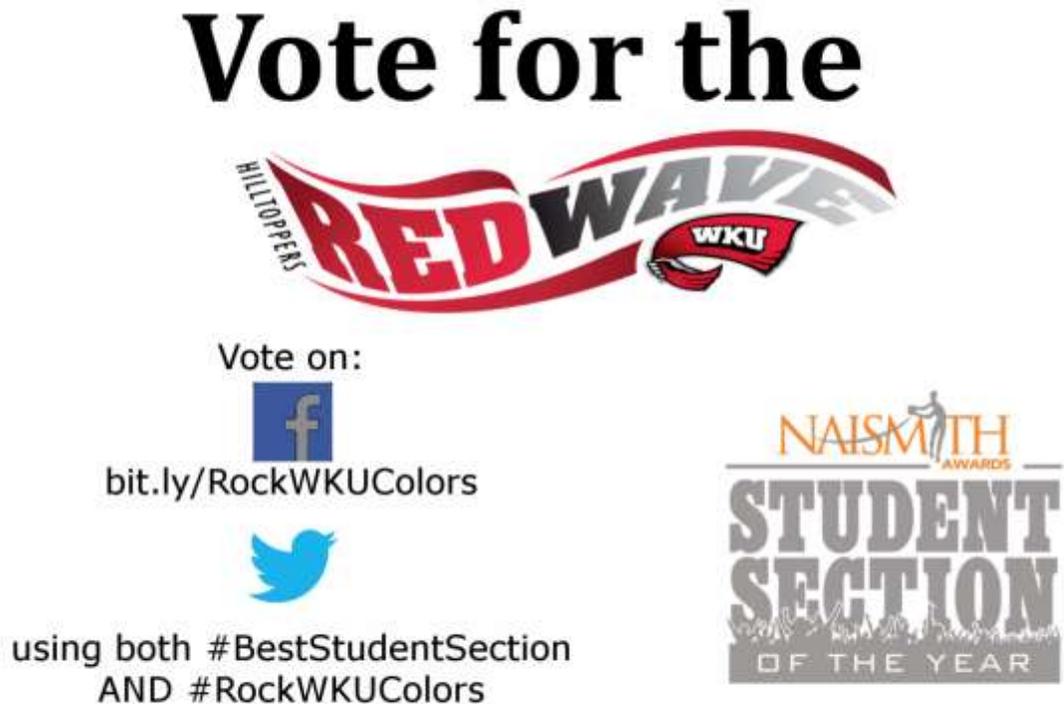
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67EULSqh1Tk>.

Basketball season was finally upon us. For the WKU Red Wave, it was a time of new beginnings. The embrace of the WKU student population was rather good for the new initiative. The first week games would be crucial in getting new members as the effectiveness of the rewards structure diminished further in the season. The first few WKU Men's and Women's Basketball games allowed approximately 25 more members to sign up for the organization. This was another great influx of members and funding to the organizational account.

By signing up for the Red Wave, students provided us with their email address. This allowed for us to open another channel of communication with our members. A weekly email was sent to the members when there were events scheduled. . . These emails informed the members of the WKU Red Wave of upcoming athletic events, bonus points events, exclusive events, and other ventures that the organization was pursuing. All emails that were sent to members can be found in the appendix of this document.

During basketball season, the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in conjunction with the Collegiate Licensing Company hosts the Student Section of the Year contest. The contest pits student sections across the nation in a battle to see which fan base is the strongest. With the Red Wave in full swing, one of my goals was to see how far that we could make it in the contest. I took it under my wing immediately and tried to get WKU to the ultimate prize. Voting took place on Facebook and allowed for fans to vote once daily on the Facebook application and allowed for bonus points to be earned by Facebook and Twitter sharing using the hashtags #BestStudentSection and #RockWKUColors. I created a shortlink ([bit.ly/RockWKUColors](http://bit.ly/RockWKUColors)) and placed it on social media accounts for

the WKU Red Wave. A flyer was also created that was passed out to fans at multiple WKU Basketball events to encourage voting.



**Figure 4.1: The flyer that was created and passed out to WKU fans to encourage voting in the Student Section of the Year contest**

After weeks of promotion and voting by fans nationwide, WKU was not able to make the top 16 of the contest and earn a spot in the next round. The Red Wave did finish #21 in the contest placing them over all other Sun Belt Conference foes and over the University of Kentucky. The first place finish in the Sun Belt Conference earned WKU Athletics a \$250 donation to the general scholarship fund. This accomplishment was recorded in the press release found at this link:

<http://www.wkusports.com/genrel/031914aaa.html>.

Perks of membership in the WKU Red Wave included access to exclusive events that were only for members in the organization. Many exclusive events were proposed, but few actually came to fruition because of various factors with scheduling and other unforeseen circumstances. These ideas were good, however and can still be used in future years and seasons for the organization. Exclusive events that were planned and held for members included pizza in the student entrance tunnel that was exclusively for dues-paying members, a pizza party and coaches' appearance in one of the auxiliary gyms prior to a men's basketball game, and my personal favorite, which was access to a Hilltopper Athletic Foundation event. The Hilltopper Athletic Foundation (HAF) is the development arm of the WKU Athletics department. They are charged with securing donations that pay for the functions of the athletics department. The organization plans many donor appreciation events throughout the year. These include anything from barbeques to specialty dinners. The Red Wave received an invitation from the Hilltopper Athletic Foundation to attend the WKU Football Signing Day event that was held on National Letter of Intent Signing Day.



**Figure 4.2: The flyer that was produced by the Hilltopper Athletic Foundation and sent to Red Wave members**

The image in Figure 4.2 was sent to all Red Wave members and invited them to the event for free. With this partnership with the HAF, Red Wave members were given exclusive access to an event that was previously unavailable to any fan other than a donor to the foundation. Fifteen spots were allocated to Red Wave members and approximately 10 of those were redeemed on the day of the event. This event allowed for students to mingle with donors and WKU Athletics staff members while gaining valuable insight into the recruiting process for Division I athletes and the background of the players that would be donning the Hilltopper red and white for seasons to come. I received many verbal words of thanks from students that were able to attend. Those words were relayed to the athletics department staff in hopes of building rapport to

continue offerings such as this to Red Wave members. A donation was also made by the Red Wave to show our thankfulness for the opportunity.

In addition to access to exclusive events, the points system allowed for prize drawings for members who have reached a specific point threshold by a specific date.

Those thresholds were as follows:

- 10 points by December 1<sup>st</sup> entered the member into a drawing for exclusive WKU team gear.
- 20 points by January 1<sup>st</sup> entered the member into a drawing for exclusive WKU team gear.
- 30 points by February 1<sup>st</sup> entered the member into a drawing for a \$150 shopping spree to the WKU Store.
- 40 points by March 1<sup>st</sup> entered the member into a drawing for a \$500 Russell Athletic shopping spree.
- The maximum 125 points by March 1<sup>st</sup> entered the member into a drawing for a \$300 WKU Store shopping spree.

WKU equipment managers were very generous in their donations to the WKU Red Wave. These prizes included t-shirts, jerseys, and hats. The total number of prizes numbered around 20, allowing us to select about 10 members per exclusive team gear drawing.



**Figure 4.3: Exclusive team gear provided by the WKU Athletics equipment staff**

The shopping spree prizes allowed for the winning students to procure many WKU apparel and memorabilia items. No student reached the 125 point threshold that qualified them for the \$300 WKU Store shopping spree. This allowed for that funding to be placed back into the general funding account for the organization.

The access to first reservation for college football bowl games and NCAA Tournament game tickets was a perk for Red Wave membership. The access was given to those who had accumulated the most points over the season in which the team had qualified for the post-season event. Unfortunately for the 2013-2014 academic year, the WKU Football team was left out of a post-season bowl despite an 8-4 record and the

WKU Men's Basketball team was not selected for the NCAA Tournament after elimination in the Sun Belt Tournament semifinals. The WKU Women's Basketball team was selected for the NCAA Tournament after winning the Sun Belt Tournament. The team was selected for a first round matchup against #2 seed, Baylor. The game took place at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. The travel to the game was too expensive and too far away in distance for the Red Wave to coordinate a bus trip. Members were offered first priority to the student ticket allotment as promised in official communications and advertising. No members or WKU students claimed any tickets, however. A viewing party was scheduled in the Grise Hall auditorium and was attended by approximately 20 students. This perk can be one the most valuable in gaining new members as it provides a very valuable ticket acquisition opportunity for special events such as a NCAA Tournament in which tickets can be very difficult to receive.

Finally, students in the Red Wave had priority to be selected for in-game promotions. A Red Wave exclusive promotion was created for WKU Men's Basketball games. It was a half-court shot contest where a student in the Red Wave was selected at the student entrance at random and had to make a half-court shot to win a television that was purchased by the organization. This promotion allowed for me to run the on-court promotion and create the script PA read for the promotion. The PA read that was created can be seen in the appendix of this document. After the promotion was run for select games, no student was able to connect on the shot, but the promotion was seemingly one of the most successful in crowd engagement as the participant was encouraged to get the roar of the crowd behind them to create the unforgettable experience that the WKU Red Wave strived to create for its' members.

For an initiative that was unveiled at the beginning of basketball season and previously had not existed, the WKU Red Wave was successful in its' first partial year of operation. The organization provided an opportunity for a better fan experience, increased engagement of the WKU student body, and an opportunity for students to be rewarded for their attendance and crowd participation in WKU Athletics events. Altogether, 80 WKU students purchased a membership in the WKU Red Wave. The number satisfied the WKU Athletics Marketing department leaders and ensured that the program would remain intact for the next year with revisions to ensure greater success. The points were recorded in an Excel database that was updated after each event to give the student an opportunity to know where they stood if they inquired about their situation. The 80 members averaged 23.02 points in the rewards system with 500 total check-ins for the year. When the year came to an end, 1,003 more students attended WKU Men's Basketball events in 2013-2014 over the 2012-2013 season. Volleyball, softball, and soccer attendance also saw bumps in total attendance over the previous season. WKU Football also saw a slightly higher average attendance over the previous season. The effectiveness of the WKU Red Wave was proven with these numbers. Though only a small portion of the student body adopted the program, the partial year allowed for valuable promotion and brand recognition that could extend into the 2014-2015 academic year at Western Kentucky University.

## CHAPTER 5

### BUDGET DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION FOR THE WKU RED WAVE

In order to have a successful business venture, one must be able to plan for potential expenses and revenues and keep track of the financial transactions of their business. The WKU Red Wave was no different. In the management of the finances of the organization, Microsoft Excel spreadsheets were set up to manage revenues and expenditures that were incurred and that were anticipated to be incurred.

The original funding for this venture was provided by the WKU Honors College Gatton Academy Alumni Funding Grant. This grant provides up to \$1500 per semester for Gatton Academy alumni pursuing Honors Capstone Experience/Thesis projects. This money provided a great jumpstart of funding to get the organization established. . This original investment from the WKU Honors College allowed for travel to Butler University to learn about their Dawg Pound student group and meet with their administrators to learn their keys for success. This trip was a pivotal point in the development of the organization.

Additionally, the WKU Student Government Association provides opportunities for student organizations to seek funding for their ventures throughout the academic year. The funding was limited to \$500 maximum. In order to apply for the funding, paperwork was required to be submitted. After the paperwork was reviewed, candidates are invited

to an in-person interview with members of the SGA who serve on the student organization funding committee. In the interview, questions are asked about what the funding will be used for, organization size and scope, and activities that the organization performs in the WKU community. In the end, \$320 was awarded to the WKU Red Wave to assist in the funding of the WKU Red Wave operations.

The funding awarded to the WKU Red Wave was used in a variety of ways. WKU Red Wave silicone wristbands were manufactured and given to members at a variety of check-ins. In reference to the exclusive events that were advertised, pizza and drinks were purchased with some of this funding. These exclusive events included a watch party at Mass Media Auditorium, a pregame shoot-around in the Diddle Arena Practice Gym, and food in the student entrance tunnel. Posters and signage was also ordered with the initial influxes and with membership dues. In addition, for potential branding opportunities, the WKU Red Wave logo was set up with BlueCotton in Bowling Green, KY for embroidery opportunities so that future leaders of the group could get apparel items produced with the organization logo. Finally, the funding was used as prizes for raffles including WKU Store shopping sprees.



**Figure 5.1: Wichita State Watch Party advertisement**

At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year, the WKU Red Wave had a cash reserve of \$2897.76 available which allowed for the setup for immense growth and increased opportunities to reward WKU students for attending WKU Athletic events and supporting their school. The list of transactions for the 2013-2014 academic year can be found in the appendix of this document.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR THE WKU RED WAVE

As the 2013-2014 academic year came to a close, contingency planning was underway to ensure that the WKU Red Wave would continue to grow and thrive on the campus of Western Kentucky University. On March 31, 2014, I was named the Assistant Director of Marketing and Sales for Ohio University Athletics. This early departure required me to align the affairs of the Red Wave to ensure this continued growth. Planning for the future and anticipating certain issues that could arise help in any situation not just that of a student rewards program. This contingency planning also allowed for me to take a step back and look at what went well and what needed improvement. Social media effectiveness, fan experience improvements, sponsorship engagement, and other aspects were reviewed.

Social media is a large part of marketing in today's environment. The Facebook account of the WKU Red Wave received 92 likes in my time of running the page. The Twitter account accumulated over 330 followers during my time in managing the account. The Instagram page was less utilized, but still had over 50 followers during my management period. Continuing to grow these pages would need to be a priority to ensure more communication with members and with prospective members. Promotion of these pages at events, via email, and on WKUSports.com and other official channels would be necessary to help in this growth.

The creation of a better fan experience is an ongoing process for all athletics departments nationwide. Creating an exciting, engaging atmosphere for the students of WKU was another goal. Creating exclusive events that made membership worth the dues and having more in-game promotions like the half-court shot for a television helped in this aspect of our contingency plans. This better fan experience will help in bringing more students to the game, keep them at the game longer, and bring them back for more events.

The sponsors of the WKU Red Wave were very helpful in eliminating the cost of t-shirts and for providing some promotional items. However, the sponsors were not as engaged in the product as I would have liked. IMG College, the multimedia and sponsorship rights holder for WKU Athletics, sells the sponsorships for the Red Wave. The sponsors for the first year of operation included Wendy's, the USMC, and Image Ink Customs. These companies' logos were placed on the back of the official shirt that was given to all members. One of the goals for the next years of operation would be to find more engaged sponsors that would provide products such as food or prizes and play a better role in engaging with the members of the organization.

Leadership of the organization once I departed for my new position was also a priority. As this was my main responsibility with the athletics marketing department, others did not have as much experience with the intricacies of the organization. As time got closer to my departure in July 2014, the decision was made to turn the reigns of the group over to the graduate assistants and full-time intern that would be around for the next year. I was able to discuss my mission and views for the organization and train them on the software used for point allocation. I also made myself available for any questions at any time for these people who would ensure a great future for the WKU Red Wave. In

July 2014, the access to the social media accounts along with all other aspects were relinquished by me to these people who I trusted would bring the WKU Red Wave into the future, and the future was bright.

## CHAPTER 7

### WKU RED WAVE IN 2014-2015 ACADEMIC YEAR

Though my time on the campus of Western Kentucky University ended in July 2014, the WKU Red Wave still lives on, which makes this WKU Honors Capstone Experience/Thesis project so unique. Many CE/T projects are only done during the duration of the assignment and have little to no lasting effect on the community. The WKU Red Wave was adjusted due to shortcomings that were visible and given the support to survive and thrive in the WKU Athletics community.

From the 2013-2014 academic year to the 2014-2015 academic year, some adjustments were made to increase membership and make a better fan experience for the members of the group. The following changes were made to the original model that I designed:

- Membership dues were reduced from \$10 to \$5 and still included a new t-shirt and sticker for the student's WKU ID.
- More exclusive events were held such as Breakfast with Coach Heard and a Film Study with WKU Football.
- Different giveaways were put into the raffle process including Visa gift cards and an exclusive Diddle statue.
- Freshmen were specifically targeted during M.A.S.T.E.R. Plan week.

These changes were most definitely seen as positives as the membership of the WKU Red Wave increased dramatically over the previous year. In 2013-2014, there were approximately 80 members. In 2014-2015, the membership rose to 460 (an increase of 575%) and the budget of the WKU Red Wave was still thriving while making a profit for the year.

## APPENDIX

WKU Red Wave				
Academic Year 2013-2014				
Budget (Last Updated on 7-11-14 by Jw)				
<b>Beginning Balance</b>	Honors College CE/T Funding	Deposit	Zack McKa	\$ 1,500.00
	Gas Expense (Butler Trip)	Pilot #037	Jon Warrer	\$ (38.66)
	Gas Expense (Butler Trip)	Speedway #9626	Jon Warrer	\$ (25.50)
	Red Towel Expense	WKU Store	Jon Warrer	\$ (3.50)
	WKU SGA Org. Aid Funding	Deposit	Zack McKa	\$ 320.00
	Red Wave Membership Dues	Deposit	Zack McKa	\$ 311.00
	Red Wave Wristbands	Wrist-band.com	Jon Warrer	\$ (171.89)
	Wichita St. Viewing Party Sup	Walmart #5236	Jon Warrer	\$ (17.47)
	Wichita St. Viewing Party Piz	Papa John's #00	Jon Warrer	\$ (69.90)
	Red Wave Television Expens	Walmart #0701	Jon Warrer	\$ (103.88)
	Ole Miss Student Pizza Exper	Little Caesar's	Jon Warrer	\$ (53.00)
	Red Wave Membership Dues	Deposit	Jon Warrer	\$ 239.00
	Red Wave Membership Dues	Deposit	Zack McKa	\$ 120.00
	Honors College CE/T Funding	Deposit	Zack McKa	\$ 1,384.00
	BlueCotton Logo Setup and I	BlueCotton	Jon Warrer	\$ (25.45)
	WKU Hilltopper Athletic Foun	WKU HAF	Jon Warrer	\$ (50.00)
	Red Wave Event Pizza	Mister B's	Jon Warrer	\$ (80.00)
	Red Wave Event Supplies an	Kroger#509	Jon Warrer	\$ (11.54)
	Red Wave February Prize (Bc	WKU Store	Jon Warrer	\$ (150.45)
	Red Wave Membership Dues	Deposit	Zack McKa	\$ 40.00
	Red Wave Membership Dues	Deposit	Zack McKa	\$ 35.00
	Survey Prize (Bookstore Gift (	WKU Store	Jon Warrer	\$ (50.00)
	Red Wave Presentation Trav	Check	Zack McKa	\$ (200.00)
<b>Total Current Balance</b>				\$ 2,897.76
<b>Anticipated Expenses</b>				
<b>Total Available Balance</b>				\$ 2,897.76

# WKU RED WAVE



Student Organization

2013 Marketing Plan

*Zack McKay – Director of Marketing*

*Thomas Harris – Assistant Director of Marketing*

*Jon Cosby – Marketing Intern*

*Jon Warren – WKU Red Wave President*

*(Updated 3/24/2014)*

## ***Goals & Objectives***

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WKU Red Wave is a student run organization committed to building excitement and school spirit for Hilltopper Athletics. WKU Red Wave will begin in October 2013, in efforts to increase student attendance at men's and women's basketball games.

This will require focused efforts in all areas involved on campus and in the community. The following are the major areas of focus:

- 1) Enroll at least 1,000 students in the WKU Red Wave
- 2) Increase overall student attendance by 15% at our major sports home games.
- 3) Increase the student body attendance at major sports home games.
- 4) Engage student in new fun promotions to enhance in-game atmosphere.
- 5) Implement at least one exclusive event per sport for the group
- 6) Develop sponsorship opportunities for local businesses through the help of IMG.

## ***Membership***

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- Membership for the 2013-14 WKU Red Wave program will activate for the first WBB home exhibition game on Oct. 29, 2013 and end on March 31, 2014.
- For all years following the inaugural year, membership will run from Oct. 1 – March 31.
- There will be an annual membership fee of \$10.
- Membership in the organization shall be open to those regularly enrolled Western Kentucky University, but without any restrictions based on sex, religion and national origin, except as expressly permitted by law
- The WKU Red Wave will abide by the rules and regulation of the university as a condition to initial and continued registered status
- WKU Red Wave agrees to serve as a member for the entire academic year unless alternate arrangements are made with the Athletic Marketing Department
- Each WKU Red Wave member is encouraged to check their [topper.wku.edu](mailto:topper.wku.edu) email on a regular basis and respond to sign-up opportunities
- As a member of the WKU Red Wave, each member is expected to act as a representative of the University at all times. Students must present themselves in a professional, mature, and tasteful manner.
- All members will have to fill out a membership form during our designated registration dates (i.e. Hysteria, DSU, fairs, etc.) they may also print out the membership form online at [wkusports.com](http://wkusports.com). Cash, check, or major credit/debit cards will be accepted.
- To track how many events the students attend, we have purchase two ID scanners that will capture the members' information (Name, 800#, etc.) and will give us the ability to track them once information is transferred into the SEAT program.

## ***Benefits of \$10 Membership Fee***

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- Official WKU Red Wave t-shirt
- Chance to win exclusive gear from WKU athletics teams
- Priority to be chosen for in-game student promotions
- Exclusive invitations to events with WKU athletics teams & coaches during the year
- Placed on priority list to purchase tickets to post season games

### **Incentives**

#### Points System

- Students will earn 2 pts. to all men's and women's home basketball games
- There will be bonus games were students may earn extra points for attending the following games;
  - Bonus games
    - Lady Topper Volleyball: Nov. 13 vs. Georgia State @ 6pm = 3 pts.
    - Lady Topper Volleyball: Nov. 15 vs. South Alabama @ 7pm = 3 pts.
    - Lady Topper Volleyball: Nov. 17 vs. Troy @ 12 noon = 3 pts.
    - Lady Topper Basketball: Nov. 27 vs. Louisville @ 7pm = 6 pts.
    - Hilltopper Football: Nov. 30 vs. Arkansas State @ 3pm = 10pts.
    - Hilltopper Basketball: Dec. 18 vs. Southern Miss @ 7pm = 6 pts.
    - Hilltopper Basketball: Dec. 30 vs. Ole Miss. @ 7pm = 6 pts.
    - Lady Topper Basketball: Jan. 15 vs. Arkansas-Little Rock @ 7pm = 6 pts.
    - Hilltopper Basketball: Feb. 15 vs. South Alabama @ 7pm = 6 pts.
    - 3 Baseball games, (TBA) = 3 pts. each
    - 3 Softball games, (TBA) = 3 pts. each

#### Total points each member could earn per sport

- Men's Basketball – 48 pts.
- Women's Basketball – 40 pts.
- Football – 10 pts.
- Volleyball – 9 pts.
- Baseball – 9 pts.
- Softball – 9 pts.
  - **Total max points = 125**

### Incentive Levels

- Earn 10 points by Dec. 1, your name will be entered to win exclusive WKU Team Gear
- Earn 20 points by Jan. 1, your name will be entered to win exclusive WKU Team Gear
- Earn 30 points by Feb. 1, your name will be entered to win a \$150 WKU Store shopping spree
- Earn 40 points by Mar. 1, your name will be entered to win a \$500 Russell shopping spree
- Students with 125 points by Mar. 1 will be entered to win \$300 to the WKU Store. If there are no students with 125 points, we will take the next highest.
  - The amount of drawings we do at each level will depend on inventory.
- Student ticket allotment for post season play will go to the members with the highest point totals (i.e. If we get 100 student tickets for NCAA tournament game, the top 100 students will get priority to those tickets.)

## ***Official Rules & Details***

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- You must have an active student ID from Western Kentucky University to participate in WKU Red Wave, full-time and part-time students will be accepted.
- Students will sign up during our designated sign-up periods, pay their fee, and receive their t-shirt. Cash, check, and debit/credit card are the only acceptable methods of payment.
- Each WKU Red Wave member will receive a sticker to put on their student ID, which lets us know they are a paid member.
- Each WKU Red Wave member will be entered into a database, where their points will be added after each event.
- WKU Red Wave members will be able to enter each game 2 hours before the gates open to have access to exclusive seating.
- All WKU students will continue to receive FREE entry to all WKU Athletic home games by showing their ID at the student entrance. WKU Red Wave members must have their student ID swiped upon entry to receive their points for that event.
- There will be a WKU Red Wave banner that will hang over the railing of the student section
- WKU Red Wave members will receive priority to be chosen to participate in on-court student promotions
- For prize drawings, each winning name must be confirmed to make sure that the winner is actually a WKU Red Wave member.

## **Budget**

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Below is a breakdown of the budget, not including revenue from student fees.

### Revenue

SGA Org. Aid 2013	\$500 to be deposited in Nov.
Marketing Budget	\$1,200
<u>Student Capstone Project Check</u>	<u>\$1,435</u> deposited in Aug. 2013
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$3,135</b>

### Expenses

Red Wave Posters	\$61.63 paid from Gerald's Trade
Red Wave Logo	\$120 paid from Gerald's Trade
Promotion	\$100 paid from marketing budget
Banner	\$110 paid from Gerald's Trade
Table Cloth (Signature Signs)	\$325 paid from marketing budget
ID Scanners (2 @ \$210)	\$420 paid from marketing budget
T-shirts (Bluecotton)	\$200 paid from marketing budget
	<u>\$1,400</u> paid from Student Capstone Project Check
<b>Total Gerald's Trade Expenses</b>	<b>\$291.63</b>
<b>Total Marketing Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,045</b>
<b>Total Red Wave Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,400</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>\$2,736.63</u></b>
<b>Net Revenue</b>	<b><u>\$690</u></b>

## ***Promotion of WKU Red Wave***

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- Branding
  - Since this is the first year for WKU Red Wave, we will make sure that the brand is easily recognizable to all, and especially the following groups; WKU Students, the Bowling Green community and potential sponsors.
  - Everyone that is promoting WKU Red Wave will use the same logo, verbiage and logos.
- Print
  - We will have Gerald's produce posters that will be distributed in high traffic areas around campus (i.e. DSU, Garrett, Residences Halls, etc.)
  - We will print out flyers and handbills that Street Team will pass out around campus
  - Thomas will reach out to his College Heights Herald contact, Elliot Pratt, to see if he wants to run a story on it – work with Michael Schroeder
- Internet
  - There will be a WKU Red Wave page, in the “Fan Zone” section under the “Students” tab. This page will contain all the important information and a printable .pdf registration form. – Thomas & Michael to handle
  - Marketing Staff will create & manage social media accounts for WKU Red Wave.
  - Promote the group via WKU Athletics social media accounts.
  - Create a press release that will announce the creation of the group, that will go out on wkusports.com – work with Michael Schroeder
- Email
  - Thomas will send an email out to the most recent Hudson Hillraisers list.
  - Jon will send an email out to the 700+ students from the summer survey list
  - Thomas will send an email to Stephanie Scott and Blair Silliman that they will send to all of the student organizations and students that live on campus, respectively.
  - Zack will send an email to all of the fraternities and sororities presidents.
- Hilltopper Hysteria
  - Have a PA read about the group
  - Have a table set up to sign students up and answer questions
- PA's
  - We will promote Red Wave inside of all home games in every sport

## ***Proposed Exclusive Events***

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**These events will be open to every Red Wave member, regardless of how many games they have attended.**

### **Men's and Women's Basketball:**

- **Knockout:** If a student is able to win the game of Knockout with select players, they will win a prize.
- **Open Practice:** Members will be allowed to attend a practice of the basketball team and will be able to interact with players and coaches after the practice.
- **Student Section at Coach's Show:** There will be a dedicated section for students to sit at the restaurant that the Coach's Show is held.

### **Football:**

- **Open Practice:** Members will be allowed to attend select practices.
- **Topper Tunnel:** Members will form on the on-field tunnel for a select home game.
- **Honorary Flag Holders:** Select members will have the opportunity to run with the WKU letter flags across an end zone during a specific time period at select home games.

### **Baseball and Softball:**

- **Open Practice:** Members will be allowed to attend select practices.
- **Dodgeball Game:** Members will have a chance to play Dodgeball with the players.
- **Batting Practice:** Members will have the opportunity to see how they match up against some of the Sun Belt's finest pitchers by taking batting practice against them.
- **Party Deck with the Team:** Members will enjoy a free hotdog with the WKU Baseball or Softball team after select games.

### **Volleyball:**

- **Open Practice:** Members will be allowed to attend select practices.
- **Ace in your Face:** Members will have the opportunity to defend the serves of WKU volleyball and vice-versa.
- **Movie Night with the Lady Toppers:** Members will be allowed to attend a movie showing in DUC Auditorium or outside of DSU around Halloween with the WKU volleyball and WKU soccer teams.

## ***Organizational Structure of the WKU Red Wave***

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The WKU Red Wave will be managed by an officer team that will include a President and two Vice-Presidents. The current officer team contains the following roles and students in said roles:

- President: Jon Warren
- Vice-President: Ethan Graves
- Vice-President: Jalynn Britt

The officer team will be in charge of the planning and implementation of all aspects of the WKU Red Wave and will be assisted by WKU Athletics Marketing staff.

In order to achieve a system of checks and balances, any major expense or decision that involves the WKU Red Wave must be presented to and voted upon by a general committee. This committee will be made up of students that are believed to be highly involved in WKU Athletics and will commit to the process of developing the Red Wave into one of the most successful student organizations on the campus of Western Kentucky University. This committee will contain five (5) members and will include:

- Evan Brown, former leader of the Red Riot student group
- Othello Bell, current WKU Athletics Marketing Street Team member
- Harsh Pandya, current WKU Athletics Marketing Street Team member
- Ben Luedtke, current WKU Athletics Marketing Street Team member
- TBD

## ***Promotion of the WKU Red Wave***

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In order to increase awareness of the WKU Red Wave and increase membership in the organization, the following steps will be taken.

- An email will be sent to Dr. Darren Smith in the Department of Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport who will forward along the information to all Sport Management students. The email will also be forwarded to program coordinators throughout the department in hope that it will be passed along to other students in the department.
- Presentations will be made to the leaders of the Greek community by Jon Warren and Jonathan Cosby at the meeting of leaders in the Greek community.
- Class presentations will be made to courses that Ethan Graves and Jon Warren are enrolled in.
- The WKU Athletics Marketing Street Team will be meeting in the next week to be informed of the WKU Red Wave and to be informed of their role in the success of the organization. The Street Team will be instrumental in the promotion of the Red Wave through their engagement of the WKU student body.
- A promotional video will be scheduled for when the new signage is installed for the new student entrance at E.A. Diddle Arena. This video will show the location of the new entrance as well as the new atmosphere that will be created by the new entrance to the student section at Diddle Arena.