

Final Report
Faculty and Staff Diversity Mini-Grant

Sponsor: Sandy Alspach, Sports Communication
Co-Sponsors: Entertainment Unlimited, Career Services, Office of Multicultural Student Services, Television and Digital Media Production, Journalism and Technical Communication, Athletic Department
Event: Campus/Community Presentation by Drea Avent, NFL Sidelines Reporter/Fox Sports Los Angeles
Date: April 11, 2012
Location: Williams Auditorium

Self-Evaluation

Drea Avent's presentation was dynamic and inspirational, true to her presentation title: "Determination to Get to Your Destination". She signed photos after the presentation, interacting personally with each person who came up on stage for this activity. This evening event capped a day of activities: Ms Avent had lunch with Angela Roman from Career Services and Melissa Hanson from Entertainment Unlimited, two co-sponsors of her visit; visited the Jim Crow Museum; talked with the students in COMM 389 Sports Communication (Sports Comm) about her career path; and ate at the Rock with the 5-member executive board of the new Sports Careers RSO. Four students from Sports Comm, who had conducted her campus visit publicity campaign as a major part of their semester course project, returned her to her hotel in Grand Rapids after the evening presentation; providing an hour of quality one-on-one time between students and guest speaker. She has continued to respond to emails and tweets from people she met on campus during her visit, encouraging Sports Communication students to pursue their career goals. In terms of the academic objectives for this event, the entire visit was a success and set a high bar for future featured speakers in the Sports Speakers Series, a key element of the Sports Communication program.

With almost \$1000 invested in advertising and more than two months' worth of communications ranging from Facebook messages to recognition on the Ferris homepage to students passing out candy and pluggers in the IRC connector, I had hoped for a bigger audience than the 40 people who came to Williams Auditorium that evening. To say I was disappointed is an understatement.

I have learned two important lessons from this venture. The first one is that financial sponsorship does not guarantee attendance. When I learned that our application for 5-Star event designation had been declined, I prepared to move the event to IRC 120. However co-sponsors Career Services and Entertainment Unlimited assured me that the audience they could bring would be too large for that room. That turned out not to be the case. The Office of Multicultural Student Services contributed to the advertising, and two members of the student PR team are African American; however there was little attendance from this community, even though we had visited the OMSS office following the Jim Crow Museum tour and introduced Ms Avent to Matt Chaney, Mike Wade and Andrea Beck, encouraging them to bring their students to the presentation.

The second lesson is that it is difficult to draw students to an event that is not promoted as entertainment, without requiring class attendance or offering extra credit. The co-sponsoring academic departments provided a few audience members for the evening event. I was grateful for Glen Okonowski's (TDMP) attendance and engagement in the question/answer period, and for Will Goode's (Athletic Department) and Leah's attendance (see below for additional observation.)

The student PR team from Sports Comm, working with a graphic designer from Entertainment Unlimited, wanted to promote Ms Avent using a "glamour photo" from their online search rather than using the material Ms Avent provided for publicity. However, I intervened, delaying posting until appropriate posters and pluggers could be printed. I do not believe that delay was a significant factor in the low turnout, given that the event had been on the Campus Calendar for two months and all co-sponsoring parties had been reminded several times and encouraged to invite their students to attend.

We learned at the 'eleventh hour' that the Torch was not publishing an issue on the Wednesday of the week before Ms Avent's visit because of the spring recess for the Easter holiday. Our plan to run a full-page ad in the Torch was reduced to purchasing an ad in the online version of the Torch. The decision to promote the event in the IRC connector and to provide some incentive give-aways was made at this time.

My take-away from this project is that I need to work more closely with a student PR team on an event of this magnitude. At the beginning of the semester, students identified the projects they wanted to work on for the Sports Comm Academic Service Learning component, constituting approximately 30% of their semester grade. The four students assigned to the PR team project had selected the special events planning project, as they explained to me, because they had had prior experience promoting campus activities. One student on the team worked for Williams Auditorium and another student worked for University Marketing. The team appeared to have the credentials to take on a major project. I connected the PR team with a member of the Athletic Department staff who was experienced in promoting sports-related events and who had agreed to mentor them. With her advice and help, the team had produced two earlier publicity campaigns for community presentations by Ferris Communication alumni currently working in the Sports industry. These earlier efforts had not produced the results I had hoped for. So, I invited another consultant (Leah Goode) to work with the team on the Avent event, and the team was given a budget of \$1500 towards publicity. However, Leah reported to me that the student team seemed resistant to her advice and did not meet with her after the first contact. Clearly my intention to demonstrate the value of seeking and following expert advice on projects, and to distance myself from the project as the "client", failed.

Finally, the Williams Auditorium staff suggested that successful events, besides 5-Star designated events, like the "Bullycide" project, have reached out to the community more directly by inviting the local schools to participate. I intend to follow this suggestion for future featured Sports Speakers Series events.

Results of the Event Assessment

The final report the student PR team wrote for their Sports Comm assignment is attached. Also attached are the assigned "Guest Response" reports written by students in COMM 389 and extra credit from those who attended the evening presentation. There was no audience survey taken at the evening event.

Attendance Figures

24 students and two members of Sports Careers RSO attended the class presentation. Williams Auditorium staff reported that 40 people attended the evening presentation.

Final Budget

Actual Expenses		
\$6100.00	Avent inclusive contract: honorarium, travel, lodging, meals	
\$ 990.71	Advertising:	
	\$ 97.05	posters/pluggers
	\$104.50	yard signs
	\$675.00	3 color ads in The Pioneer
	\$ 50.00	1 week: online ad in The Torch
	\$ 64.16	promotion in IRC connector (candy and give-aways)
\$ 49.80	Lunch	4 people at Blue Cow Café
\$ 50.40	Dinner	7 people at the Rock
\$ 272.89	Rental, Williams Auditorium (Dept. of Humanities rate)	
\$7463.80	Total spent	
\$7900.00	Total budgeted	