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Reflection Essay

I am well-equipped and prepared for my future profession after taking this course and learning how to use different PR writing skills in real organizations/businesses. This experience has been one of the most valuable and practical I have had during my time at UNC-Chapel Hill. Going into this class, I had no expectations and was unaware of the real-life practice we would get through working directly with our Non-Profit. First, Professor Carter taught us how to correctly write and format various writing assignments (News releases, public service announcements, etc.). Furthermore, Professor Carter showed us the importance of what we were learning through real-world applications of public relations materials. Although I sometimes felt I would never master specific PR writing skills or particular writing styles, Professor Carter always confidently led the way and helped me break it down so I would genuinely master these skills. The real-world experience and mastery of PR writing style make me believe I am well-equipped for my future career because of this course.

The most valuable part of my service-learning experience was working with my client (We Plant it Forward) and team members throughout the semester. Working with WPiF has tested my communication skills, and I have learned to be an even stronger and clearer communicator with others. I have always considered myself a good communicator and leader, but this experience improved my skills tremendously. Constantly ensuring everyone was on the same page about a deadline we agreed to make or communicating effectively with Maggie Bailey during our weekly meetings improved my communication skills. I also learned a lot about the procedures taken within an organization to plan and execute different events and marketing efforts.

The most challenging part of this experience was time management and scheduling. I worked with four other students, and scheduling weekly meetings with and without our client was exceptionally difficult. Our classes and schedules were so different, and it was hard to find a consistent time that worked for all of us. However, this challenge improved my ability to delegate work and leadership. I learned how to delegate work properly in case

we could not find a time for us all to meet, and I also improved my leadership skills by practicing this. The least valuable part of this experience was making a fact sheet for my client. They produce an annual report that effectively and efficiently outlines what they accomplished that year and how it relates to their primary mission. Although having that information in the fact sheet format was helpful for our client, the information I provided was familiar, and I felt my time making it could have gone elsewhere.

One recommendation I would make to We Plant it Forward would be to create a monthly newsletter of events or ways of getting involved. On the website, events could have been more apparent or listed on when and where they occurred. Tree planting and seedling events are at the core of We Plant it Forward and a vital part of the organization. A monthly letter to past, current, and future volunteers would help We Plant it Forward communicate upcoming events effectively and clearly to their community. I also suggest a more substantial online presence through their website and social media. Although We Plant it Forward has a social media presence now, creating and posting more content at events and making it feel more personal to the user would be beneficial. I have many ideas to further their online presence, including making an Instagram reel or TikTok video from one of the environmental education programs. This is a fantastic part of We Plant it Forward; something that gets less attention. Making a video composed of different footage of Maggie teaching the children, the children participating in hands-on activities to further grow their knowledge of our community environment, and clips of them explaining what this program means to them would be meaningful and tap into the audience's emotional side. To have the audience see the direct impact Maggie and the team at We Plant it Forward have on children in our community would benefit the viewer and We Plant it Forward tremendously.

I recommend that the Carolina Center for Public Service partner with We Plant it Forward in the future. My team and I learned so much more than just public relations when working with them, and I could not speak more highly about their organization. They are changing how our community treats the environment around us and reshaping/bettering it for future generations.

