

NOMINATION FORM  
CHE SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT COMPETITION

Institution University of South Carolina

Title of Project CreateAthon@USC

Director of Project Karen Mallia, Associate Professor, Journalism and Mass Communications

Contact Information of Project Director

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Establishment Date of Project August 2013

Unit That Administers Project School of Journalism and Mass Communications

Total Number of Students Involved 70 undergraduate students, 1 graduate student

Signature of Institutional President 

**PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS REGARDING THE NOMINATED PROJECT (Insert your answer after each question.)**

- 1. For purposes of this competition, the Commission on Higher Education defines service learning as college student learning at any level and in any situation that is *linked* in a direct, hands-on fashion to the resolution of a problem or concern in a target community outside the institution *and is related* to a college course with some type of reflection activity. Briefly, how does your project meet the parameters of this definition?**

Creative Leadership (JOUR 530) is a three-credit service-learning course in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of South Carolina. Students in this course participated in a service-learning project called "CreateAthon@USC." CreateAthon@USC is a 24+ hour event where students partner with professional mentors, university faculty, staff, and community agencies to develop pro bono communications for non-profit agencies within South Carolina. Class members act as liaisons to the non-profit organizations they serve and lead teams of student volunteers working on behalf of their client. During the 2013 fall semester, the Creative Leadership course enrolled 13 students who supervised an additional 49 student volunteers representing various majors and who were divided into six teams. In addition to the students working directly to serve the non-profit agencies, a "documentary team" comprised of 8 students managed CreateAthon@USC communications before and during the event. The teams worked on projects that benefited Edgefield County Theatre Company, Federation of Families of South Carolina, Harvest Hope Food Bank, Helen Hill Media Education Center, Sexual Trauma Services of the Midlands (STSM), and Tutor Eau Claire. This course was designed to help students not only learn and understand the unique challenges inherent in managing creative people in organizations but to also apply the key principles of managing teams and team work through engaging and interacting with community-based organizations. Students learn how to conduct an exploratory needs assessment and address ways to appropriately meet those needs. The course also provides opportunities to analyze and evaluate current and historical campaigns for non-profits and social causes in order to recognize why and how they are effective and to develop creative judgment. Finally, students are exposed to and develop an appreciation for the ethical challenges inherent in non-profit communication.

- 2. Specifically, which segments of the college/university community does your project involve?**

Creatathon@USC involved a variety of communities and segments across the University of South Carolina. Specifically, this project included undergraduate students in advertising, public relations, visual communications, broadcasting, graphic design, media, music, and the arts. A graduate student in the Master of Mass Communication Integrated Communications program served as Project Manager for the event. Eight alumni volunteered as professional mentors. Two of the mentors are faculty and one is a staff member in the university communications department. In addition to undergraduate students, staff from the Center for Teaching Excellence, the Leadership Cohort, USC Connect, and the Office of Student Engagement supported course development and implementation.

For example, the Director of the Carolina Leadership Initiative delivered a guest lecture. Also, Student Engagement staff members presented to students in JOUR 530 on the first day class and defined and described service-learning. Students learned helpful tips for working with non-profit agencies and local community members. Student Engagement staff also administered a pre-course assessment on the first day of class and returned at the end of the semester to administer a post-course assessment to evaluate student learning over the course of the semester.

**3. How many students (specify degree levels to the extent possible) does the project affect?**

The project involved students who enrolled in the service-learning course as well as those who volunteered at the CreateAthon@USC event. Creative Leadership, JOUR 530, was a new course in fall 2013 and was open to all university students with junior or senior standing. In its first year, 13 students enrolled to lead the project for course credit. There are plans for this course to be associated with the university's new leadership minor, which will no doubt expand future enrollment. Students in the course promoted CreateAthon@USC and received 74 applications for student volunteers. Due to the number of clients pre-selected and the parameters of their communication requirements, only 49 student volunteers could be accepted. These numbers are expected to grow as the program expands in upcoming years. The student volunteers who participated in CreateAthon@USC represented a variety of educational levels and age categories.

**4. Describe the target community or communities your project serves.**

CreatAthon@USC served non-profit agencies and community members across South Carolina. Students worked in teams to research and assess the needs and current communications of an organization and developed a comprehensive communication strategy for their client. The non-profits that were a part of CreatAthon@USC were the Edgefield County Theatre Company, Federation of Families of South Carolina, Harvest Hope Food Bank, Helen Hill Media Education Center, Sexual Trauma Services of the Midlands, and Tutor Eau Claire. By serving these non-profit agencies, the targeted communities who were served included women in crisis, children and youth, and individuals and families experiencing food insecurity.

**5. Describe your project's effectiveness in helping to solve the problems or concerns in the target community.**

Students in CreatAthon@USC increased awareness in Columbia about the arts, literacy, sexual assault awareness, food insecurity, and mental health advocacy by providing six community agencies with marketing materials and a marketing campaign. Students who partnered with the Edgefield Theatre Company and the Helen Hill Media Education Center used their marketing skills to raise awareness about the arts. Specifically, they created materials to promote educational opportunities for youth and adults interested in film, media and theatre arts, theater opportunities and increased

access for underserved populations, and media literacy through the training and support of K-12 students. Students created an online ticketing system for Edgefield Theatre, which will significantly expand the reach of this rural community theatre. Students who partnered with Sexual Trauma Services of the Midlands (STSM) raised awareness about the resources that STSM provides such as free and confidential counseling as well as education for the community about awareness and prevention of sexual violence. Students who partnered with Harvest Hope Food Bank created materials to raise awareness about the resources Harvest Hope offers to those living with food insecurities and created a marketing campaign aimed at getting businesses to sponsor and donate to Harvest Hope. Students also spread awareness about dyslexia and literacy by promoting Tutor Eau Claire's tutoring services and by directing families to resources to help struggling readers in a community with one of the state's lowest high school graduation rates. Finally, students were able to create marketing materials to help the Federation of Families of South Carolina advocate for children with mental health and behavioral problems, thus eliminating the stigma surrounding children's mental health issues.

**6. Describe the degree to which your project enhances student learning while providing specific examples of the service learning activities the students engage in. Also explain how the service learning activities reinforce or apply what the students learn in the classroom.**

Thirteen students participated in a fall 2013 service-learning course assessment. Data reveal that as a result of their participation in the course, the vast majority of students "experienced growth" in terms of their ability to apply knowledge they learned through their service-learning experience to solve real life problems (92.86%) and their ability to apply career related skills to make choices and/or address identified local community needs (85.71%). Qualitative responses were also overwhelmingly positive. In response to how the course enhanced their learning, students reported:

- "Practicing to be a "creative leader" in this course was a hands-on, trial and error, experience. I learned a lot about the community and its needs in regards to literacy from my work with Tutor Eau Claire."
- "I now understand how to lead and what it takes to lead in the creative industry."
- "This experience helped me learn how to best communicate with clients."
- "It has given me insights on how to effectively lead people and groups."
- "It helped me learn to deal with people more effectively, and because of this I was more prepared to meet the client's needs."

**7. Is there academic credit associated with the project (not necessary for submission)? If so, please explain the particulars.**

Creative Leadership is a three-credit course offered through the School of Journalism and Mass Communications. Thirteen students were enrolled in the course in fall 2013. An additional 49

students participated in the service-learning project and were able to gain valuable hands-on experience but did not receive academic credit for their participation.

In addition to the students working directly to serve the non-profit agencies, a “documentary team” managed CreateAthon@USC communications before and during the event, learning from an alumni mentor. They learned social media management, photography, video production and editing. Their output included 121 tweets in 16 hours, 1,977 total reach on Facebook, and 28 bio videos.

**8. If funding is required, how is the project funded and what is the approximate annual budget for the project?**

The approximate cost for CreateAthon@USC was \$6,500. This included a graduate assistant stipend and the cost for materials. The project was internally funded through several departmental grants including a Sodexo grant, a Sorority Council grant, a Center for Teaching Excellence grant, and a Carolina Leadership Initiative grant. External funding was also secured through the American Advertising Federation of the Midlands, The Adams Group, and the Carolina Eastern Warehouse. Local vendors such as Grouchos, Moe’s, Hooligans, Red Bull, and Cupcake contributed food and beverage donations to CreateAthon@USC.

**9. Feel free to add any other comments you may have about your project.**

CreateAthon@USC is much more than an exemplary service-learning effort. It is a multi-disciplinary effort that brings together students, faculty, and staff at a large university to work together toward a common goal to benefit the greater good. It provides a platform for connecting academic departments to the professional community and nonprofit partners. Most importantly, it exerts enormous influence on the missions of community organizations, in turn helping the community members they serve.

The CreateAthon@USC project embodies the University of South Carolina’s commitment to service-learning. Service to the community is at the heart of the University’s mission statement which reads, “The primary mission of the University of South Carolina is the education of the state’s diverse citizens through teaching, research, creative activity, and service.” This approach allows us to incorporate service into all facets of the University. In addition to JOUR 530, during the 2012-2013 academic year, 73 sections of 52 unique courses were identified as service-learning classes. This is a 49% increase in the number of sections offered from the 2011-2012 academic year. Service-learning classes were featured in 19 different academic departments representing 9 of the University’s 13 colleges and schools. Enrollment in service-learning classes was a total of 1,965 students for the academic year representing a 6% increase from the 1,858 students enrolled in service-learning courses during 2011-2012. At the University of South Carolina, we incorporate six hallmarks of service-learning including: integrative learning, high quality service, collaboration, civic

responsibility, reflection, and evaluation and assessment. JOUR 530 incorporates these hallmarks and has demonstrated the ability to enhance student learning. The University's community impact also continues to expand. During the 2012-2013 year, 23,194 students, faculty, and staff participated in volunteer service, donating 502,334 service hours to the community. The economic impact of this service to the community is estimated at \$9,618,880,80. In addition, the Carolina community made philanthropic donations to the community reported at \$978,736. Students in JOUR 530 contributed to the much larger impact from the University. However, equally important is that the course provided an opportunity to influence students' participation in service for years to come. There is no doubt that JOUR 530 is a high quality service-learning experience that is well-deserving of this recognition from the Commission on Higher Education.

You may also include supplemental information about the project (such as brochures, pictures, etc.).

Please return this form via e-mail by **March 14, 2014**, to:

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# CreateAThon@USC



















