

Advertising competition prepares students for careers

by Sheryl Hanson - Thursday, August 28, 2008

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/1166/advertising-competition-prepares-students-for-careers/>

In April, 19 University of Wisconsin Oshkosh students celebrated a first-place finish in the regional National Student Advertising Competition (NSAC) in St. Paul, Minn.

Victory was sweet because their competition was fierce — nine other schools from Canada, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin, including schools such as second- and third-place winners Marquette University and UW-Madison, respectively.

The team's regional win qualified them for the national competition, in which they earned a respectable 11th place. This was the third time the UW Oshkosh NSAC team has won the regional contest; they took home the prize in 1996 and 2003, too.

This year's group showed a true cross-section of student communicators from across campus. Majors of the team members included design, journalism, marketing and radio/TV/film.

Sweat and tears

Hopkins, Minn., native Sam Mark won't graduate until December, but he already has used his experience on the UW Oshkosh NSAC team in the business world.

Mark recently completed a summer internship at Urban Legends Entertainment in Los Angeles. In exchange for exhausting, 18-hour days, he received valuable real-life experience, coordinating film shoots for Fox Sports and "Trading Spaces: Paige's Perfect 10" on The Learning Channel (TLC). He also wrote advertising copy for Skechers; cut a trailer for "The Prince and Me" trilogy; and cut, wrote and produced promos for several TLC shows.

Being a part of NSAC was instrumental in building the skills he needed to be successful during his summer internship, Mark said.

"When I was working on a film shoot with the Fox Sports Network vice president of integrated marketing and emerging media, he asked me when I'm graduating," he said. "If it weren't for what I learned during the NSAC campaign, my skills would not have impressed the VP like they did."

When Mark first learned about NSAC, he heard it was challenging. That, he added, was an understatement.

"While I don't regret anything about NSAC, the term 'challenging class' doesn't seem fit to explain how much sweat, tears and hard work I put into this class. Yes, there were tears. I don't care if you print that," Mark said.

Journalism major Kelly Meyer, who plans to graduate in May 2009, said the experience was overwhelming at times.

“But I learned a lot about teamwork — patience, compromise, listening, sharing and defending my ideas,” she said. “It also helped me determine which direction of advertising I am most interested in pursuing.”

Mark said every student on the team had tremendous respect for one another.

“I think the biggest challenge was working as a unified team,” he said. “We all had our own opinions, but we all had to come to a conclusion about which was best.”

Opening doors

The NSAC competition encourages students to work as if they were employed by a professional advertising agency. Kirsten Strom, who graduated in May with a marketing degree, said the experience helped her secure her first professional job in Chicago.

Strom is an assistant strategist for media agency OMD, where she plans and reports on all online campaigns for Universal Studios Theme Parks in Orlando and Hollywood.

“My boss at OMD was involved in NSAC when she was in college and was a district judge in 2008 — the year I competed,” Strom said. “Having the experience in NSAC really separated me from my competition.”

NSAC advisers Dana Baumgart of the journalism department and Kathy Fredrickson of the College of Business worked hard to bring the team to championship.

“They treated us like professionals, never babying us,” Mark said. “They told us, ‘This is your project.’ We took a lot of pride in that. If we needed guidance, they offered it. But they never gave us the answers directly.”

As many UW Oshkosh alumni have found, connections with fellow graduates go a long way in lending a helping hand. Steve Behnke '03, helped Mark secure his recent internship.

“He came to UW Oshkosh to talk about his job cutting promos for TNT, and I was quite captivated,” Mark said. “Two years later, I had just finished telling my adviser, Troy Perkins, that I wanted a summer internship. That same day, he got an e-mail from Steve saying he was looking for an intern. I think the stars aligned.”

Mark plans to return to California next summer and, with his bachelor's degree completed, land a full-time job there. As he did this summer, his method of transportation will be his car.

“And I'll be waving and thanking UW Oshkosh the entire way,” he said.

- For more information about NSAC, visit www.aaf.org/default.asp?id=122.

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