

## **Five alumni utilize UWO-learned skills, land jobs at same local PR agency**

by Alyssa Kadansky - Thursday, January 23, 2014

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Students going into public relations learn that building a relationship with your client and the public is an important aspect of a successful PR campaign.

However, before the campaigns, press conferences and publicity can be planned, building a strong relationship with employers as a student is vital.

Launched in 2008, Red Shoes PR, a public relations agency based in Appleton and Madison, not only specializes in media relations, crisis communication and media training but also in giving University of Wisconsin Oshkosh alumni a chance to try their hand in the industry.

Of the nine professionals currently employed with Red Shoes, five are UW Oshkosh journalism alumni.

While UW Oshkosh's journalism students gain a strong foundation in the classroom, it is the experience in the field that UWO alumna Deniz Cakmak '13, believes was most beneficial to getting her ready for her position as an account manager for Red Shoes.

At UW Oshkosh, Cakmak was quite involved on campus. She wrote for the *Advance-Titan* and was involved in University Speaker Series.

Outside of University organizations, Cakmak also immersed herself in a variety of internships related to her journalism emphases in visual journalism and public relations. She interned with [Campus Awareness and Relationship Education](#) (C.A.R.E.) before becoming the co-student director while working as a social media intern for the [Admissions office](#). In addition, Cakmak also interned at *Women Magazine*.

It was this variety of professional experiences that helped prepare her for a career in public relations.

"Besides the technical skills that I learned in class, I would have to say it's the experiences that made me prepared," Cakmak said. "My internships, involvement and the opportunities that UWO offers are what helped me become successful."

Red Shoes helps other students get their foot in the door through mock interviews while they are still pursuing their degrees.

Red Shoes account executive Sara Montonati '10, connects with current students through mock interviews, some of whom even secured positions with Red Shoes after graduation.

"We've always been lucky to meet some great students through mock interviews," Montonati said.

“Some of those students stay in touch with us, which puts them top of mind when we are looking for candidates for our job openings.”

Red Shoes has hired three full-time staff and two interns they had previously connected with through mock interviews.

Prior to becoming one of those full-time employees helping other students get hired at Red Shoes, Montonati worked as an intern for C.A.R.E., the American Red Cross and Red Shoes.

“Each of [those internships] gave me the opportunity to enhance the skills I was learning in the classroom and apply those tactics in real, working situations,” Montonati said.

Today she serves as the primary contact for Red Shoes clients and helps them strategize and execute their public relations efforts.

“My passion for PR and all that comes with it—writing, social media, crisis communications, brainstorming, media relations, creative thinking and deadlines—is my motivation to excel daily and exceed client expectations,” Montonati said.

Red Shoes staff members have all developed a love for the field and bring their expertise to a variety of clients.

Public relations adviser Scott Becher '91, began working for Red Shoes PR after working as the chief of staff for former Wisconsin State Assemblyman Steve Wieckert.

Prior to his 15 years of experience in the field, Becher began his journalism career by writing for the *Advance-Titan* and the UW Oshkosh News Service. Becher is proud to come from a university whose journalism department has such a great reputation.

“I think that Oshkosh is known as being first-rate, first-class, one of the best schools and one of the best journalism schools in the country,” Becher said. “Folks who are very talented who went through the program excelled because of the excellent faculty in the program.”

Having worked as both a paid and unpaid staff member of the *Advance-Titan*, Becher can attest to the benefit of having real-world experience. At the time, the *Advance-Titan* had cutting-edge technology in the form of Macintosh computers and full-pagination, giving Becher a taste of real-world journalism.

He used his undergraduate experiences and went on to explore the world of government relations. Becher worked as a campaign manager for numerous candidates for government positions before taking the position with Wieckert.

Becher's experience in public relations has led him to secure clients and their work with large media outlets, including *CBS Evening News*, the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and *NPR*.

“I work hard to come up with a really good story and then it reaches a huge mass audience,” Becher said.

Michelle Yandre '11, a fellow UWO journalism department alumna, is continuing to move her way up the corporate ladder at Red Shoes. Starting out as an intern, Yandre is now an assistant account executive and continues to learn something new every day.

“In the past two years, no two days have been the same,” Yandre said. “I love that. Not only does it keep you on your toes, it also forces you to think differently day in and day out.”

Yandre took many skills with her to Red Shoes that she learned UWO's classrooms.

“UWO provided me with the building blocks I needed to be successful,” Yandre said. “That means everything from writing news releases and pitches to being able to work independently and think strategically about situations.”

Skills learned at UWO are still fresh in the mind of the newest Red Shoes team member, Karilyn Robinson '10. Robinson will use these skills in her position as an assistant account executive.

“I am looking forward to the opportunity to provide creative, strategic content for area businesses and nonprofits,” Robinson said. “I also am looking forward to working with talented colleagues who I can collaborate with and learn from.”

While attending UWO, Robinson had internships with UWO's foreign languages and literature department, *Women Magazine* and the Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce. These internships allowed her to gain experience in many different areas of public relations, including social media, design, marketing and editorial.

This variety of skills and internships is crucial for students pursuing a career in public relations as technology and the field itself continue to advance and transform. Public relations professionals are the bridge between a company and the public, and knowledge of various areas of journalism is something that Montonati believes is vital to succeed as a public relations professional.

“In this day and age, you need to know it all,” Montonati said.

As public relations students work hard in the classroom to learn the technical skills behind their field, Cakmak believes that it is the work they do outside the classroom that will be the most beneficial.

“Get as many internships as possible,” Cakmak said. “Learn about the field you're going into... Exploring what's out there will help you decide where you want to end up.”

Learn more:

- [UW Oshkosh Alumni Relations](#)
- [Red Shoes PR](#)