

Reflection Essay

I initially dreaded this course; I had no idea what a service-learning course entailed. At the beginning of the semester, the workload and service hour requirement appeared overwhelming. But as the semester progressed, I realized that service-learning courses are vital in transferring classroom skills to real-world skills. Because of the service-learning component, concepts and information clicked for me. Rather than just reading about a tool or hearing a lecture about it, I was able to use learned tools to produce content for an actual client. As a Senior, I need to learn tools that will help me in future public relations jobs. Through this experience, I was able to learn public relations writing skills and create deliverables for a real client. My anxiety over job searches and feeling inadequate has been erased. I am coming out of this experience fully confident in my writing skill as a future public relations practitioner.

The most valuable part of my experience was learning how to communicate with a client to understand needs and goals. It was intimidating at first to interact with a “real adult.” I felt underprepared and unqualified. However I gained confidence through preparedness and striving to excel on course assignments. Because I now have experience working with a client, I feel less intimidated by future client interactions in the real world.

Additionally, this experience has provided insight into the challenges and dynamics of client relationships. There were often awkward situations in which the client needs and our role as student volunteers did not align. As students, we had certain requirements to fulfill that did not align with client needs. A partial reason for this challenge is the current rebranding process of the client. These hectic times for their organization resulted in needs beyond my team’s skill set. It is unlikely that the client will use our deliverables, but the experience of working with a real organization still proved invaluable.

Along with challenging client needs, the least valuable part of my experience was the lack of usable deliverables. Due to the environment of the organization, my team was not able to produce relevant deliverables. In that aspect, I feel slightly unfulfilled coming out of this experience.

In regards to client public relations efforts, I would recommend they find the value in public relations. Although it is a tech-centered organization, public relations is vital in connecting the organization to target audiences. The client focused on aspects such as web design but not website content. Without a clear message, objective, and identity, it is unclear what services the client provides. Implementing any public relation tool will help establish the client’s brand and audience.

With the client's lack of interest in public relations, their expectations regarding the partnership were unclear. I would not recommend that the Carolina Center for Public Service work with this client for a while. The client needs to complete the rebranding process and solve logistical and organizational issues before partnering with the Carolina Center for Public Service again. In their current startup phase, it is difficult for the client to engage in a fulfilling partnership with APPLES Service-Learning.

Despite the challenges, I am glad that I took this course and look forward to applying the skills I learned in my future career.