

New Media for NONPROFITS

Students in TCF 335 New Media help nonprofits amp up their digital presence and take control of their websites and social-media accounts.

BY MARY SHANNON WELLS

In Fall 2012, following the April 27 tornado that devastated Tuscaloosa, Dr. Chandra Clark, an assistant professor in the department of journalism and creative media at The University of Alabama, began teaching UA's TCF 335 New Media course. Clark says the class, a requirement for telecommunication and film majors, wasn't enhancing all the skills students would need for careers after graduation. She also noticed that after the tornado, many nonprofits that paid outside Web developers weren't able to update their websites and other digital media quickly or efficiently. So Clark augmented the course with a service-learning component that would give her students the opportunity to help local nonprofits while learning real-world multimedia skills.

Students in TCF 335 New Media work with nonprofit community partners to build websites and website content, create and improve social-media accounts and educate nonprofit staff members on keeping those websites and social media accounts going. The end-of-semester goal is for nonprofits to start controlling their own messages, rather than relying on outside assistance.

Since Fall 2012, 195 students have helped approximately 40 community partners develop and learn to maintain a professional Internet presence. Students work in groups of five, with each group contributing roughly 50 service hours per semester. Using an estima-



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tion system developed by Independent Sector, an organization that represents nonprofits, Clark determined students have contributed more than \$1.8 million worth of digital-media work to their nonprofit partners.

"There was a feeling of accomplishment, but it was also so humbling that we could help an organization that does so much positive work in the community," says Sarah Macaluso, a telecommunication and film major from Orlando, Fla., who graduated in May 2016.

Community partners for TCF 335 change every semester. In Spring 2016, students partnered with nonprofits focused on poverty in Tuscaloosa and West Alabama. Some groups also created their own poverty-related initiatives.

Find Hope Here

The Find Hope Here Project operates programs to assist the homeless and is raising money to build The Refuge, a home-



less shelter and transitional living space in Northport, Ala. TCF 335 students who worked with the Find Hope Here Project built a website for the organization, revamped its social-media presence, created audio/video public-service announcements and developed a marketing plan. Macaluso, the team's website developer, says group members didn't focus solely on individual roles; they also collaborated on each project.

Love INC

Students who worked with Love INC, another organization that assists the homeless, created a project called Connected Through Love that works with apartment complexes in Tuscaloosa to house homeless people in empty units. The project also provides financial-literacy classes for those living in the apartments. "I learned that the tools we developed in class could help change the communities we live in," says Danielle Burney, a telecommunication and film major from Alexandria, Ala., who worked on the Love INC team and graduated in May 2016.

UA Little Tusks

Students developed the idea for the UA Little Tusks initiative, an after-school mentoring program for children living below the poverty line. In addition to homework help, arts and crafts activities and other mentoring services, the program provides meals to the children.

Home Sweet Homes

Another student-generated idea, Home Sweet Homes, uses the RV/trailer relief method often employed following nat-

ural disasters as a model for housing the homeless in West Alabama. Habitat for Humanity Tuscaloosa picked up the concept and could bring it to fruition.

Finding Freedom

TCF 335 students found domestic violence is at the root of many issues related to poverty, so one group created Finding Freedom: Domestic Violence to encourage discussion about domestic violence and sexual assault in West Alabama and promote Turning Point, which assists victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, and the UA Women and Gender Resource Center.

False Promises

To raise awareness of the little-known but growing problem of sex trafficking in West Alabama, students also built a website and various multimedia projects for an initiative called False Promises: Sex Trafficking.

"Dr. Clark's New Media class is the most important class I have taken at UA," says Rickey Shahid, a telecommunication and film major from Birmingham, Ala, who graduated in 2016. "Today everything we do involves social media. She made sure we learned how to use these platforms to our advantage."

Working with nonprofits teaches lessons as well, Clark says. "I want them to realize that they can give back to the community with their skills," Clark says.

For more information about the TCF 335 New Media course, contact Dr. Chandra Clark at 205-348-2697 or chandra.clark@ua.edu.

