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SMITH SCHOOL NEWS

Maryland Undergrads Place Second in General Motors Marketing Challenge

A team of undergraduates at the Robert H. Smith School of Business, University of Maryland, placed second and took home \$2,000 in the General Motors "GM&U" Marketing Challenge. The challenge: create an integrated marketing communications plan for GM's new College Discount Program. Out of the 49 campuses and two rounds of scoring, Maryland was one of three universities selected to travel to Detroit in December 2009 to present at the General Motors headquarters. Syracuse University came in first place, and Drexel came in third.



The College Discount Program is designed to "attract younger drivers to the GM portfolio of cars," according to the challenge posted on GM&U's Web site. Teams were required to develop an integrated marketing communications plan using their own research and ideas. "Ultimately, GM is looking to students for a plan that resonates with the target, creates a buzz for the College Discount Program and gets college students excited about GM cars," the challenge reads.

The students in the group - Tiffany Lin, Brienne Macy, Ashlee Sasscer, and Cassie Stuper - worked on this case challenge in their capstone class for the Smith School's Design and Innovation in Marketing Fellows Program. Their plan for GM's new College Discount Program was called "Moving Together," and was aimed at college students and recent graduates who are moving on to new places in their lives.

Macy, a senior marketing major and commercial Spanish minor, said, "We all definitely put a lot of time and effort into this. We were constantly discussing and revising our ideas inside and out of class - to the point where we changed our marketing campaign's tag line not too long before the contest deadline. I think we became slightly notorious in class for our extensive discussions."

Lin, a senior studio art major with a concentration in design, agreed with Macy. "We wanted a plan that would meet every goal outlined by the GM&U Challenge, yet we wanted every single element within the plan to come together as one cohesive idea. I think we were the last group to come up with our final tag line and that was a week or two before the project was due."

With the help of art professor Ruth Lozner, who taught the course, and Smith School marketing professor Mary Harms, they submitted their integrated marketing communications plan to GM and were selected as finalists on Nov. 25, 2009.

"I was very surprised - shocked almost. First when our IMC plan was chosen from the class to be submitted to GM and then again when I saw the email saying we were chosen as one of the three finalists in the overall competition," Lin said. "I got the e-mail from Professor Lozner the Wednesday before Thanksgiving and I sat there for a good 10 minutes reading the e-mail over and over again to make sure I wasn't reading it wrong. I couldn't believe it!"

The teammates said they worked hard all semester long to get to the finals of the competition.

"I gave my all in this competition," Sasscer, a senior Studio Art Major, said. "Designing the ads and coming up with ideas for promotions and events was a lot of fun for me."

"I was most excited to see GM's headquarters and to present to top GM executives. It is such a great

opportunity to even be asked to come and present to them,” Stuper, a senior marketing major and Spanish minor, said. “It is exciting that they are taking our ideas seriously and looking at something that I helped to create.”

Macy shared the same sentiments. “I was really excited to hear the judges’ feedback. Hearing what professionals, especially those from Campbell-Ewald, the ad agency GM uses, have to say about our ideas was not only interesting but incredibly useful to me as a future marketing professional.”

Both Lozner and Harms are proud of the group’s efforts.

“The students participating are part of the inaugural cohort group to go through the program, which is a collaboration between the marketing department of the Robert H. Smith School of Business and the design department in the College of Arts and Sciences,” Harms said.

Lozner said she is excited to join her group of students in Detroit to watch them and the other two schools present to the GM officials.

“I think it’s great for everybody concerned. It reflects well on the fellowship. It reflects well on everything,” she said, adding that the case the students worked on was complicated, involving social media, print ads, broadcast ads, and much more. “It was a very clever approach. After 10 weeks of really hard work it came as a big surprise. It’s very exciting.”

Jessica Bauer, Intern, Office of Marketing Communications