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VCU... Making Richmond A Great Place to Work and Live

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VCU... MAKING RICHMOND A GREAT PLACE TO WORK AND LIVE

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Project Description: VCU, established in 1968, is a young, vibrant and rapidly growing institution. Whereas components of VCU are well established, venerable, and well-recognized institutions, VCU suffers from a lack of name recognition and reputation in comparison with our peer institutions. Similarly, there is a general lack of appreciation for the strength of VCU programs at the regional, local and even institutional level. This project is designed to showcase, at the local and institutional level, the special contributions and triumphs of VCU and its staff, including both the cutting edge research and academic accomplishments and the powerful and compelling human interest stories that contribute to the richness and vitality of our institution. Our venue will be the offering of vignettes highlighting these stories on local radio, television or other media outlets. Our vision for the project is to provide a vehicle by which we promote a sense of pride in our campus communities, as well as promote the success of VCU in the Greater Richmond Area and throughout the Commonwealth. Appreciation of the strengths and successes of the institution will enhance morale of faculty and staff, positively affect students, staff and faculty recruitment and retention, and help to maintain VCU as a Research Extensive academic institution.

Project Goals: As described above, we propose to use this project as a mechanism to raise appreciation for the strengths of our institution internally, locally and regionally. Specifically, our goals are to:

1. Instill pride and enhance morale among the VCU community by telling stories of the daily triumphs and the meaningful contributions of VCU
2. Provide tangible examples of the impact VCU makes on the Greater Richmond community
3. Foster a sense of camaraderie among all levels of staff
4. Generate excitement about the future of VCU
5. Increase the visibility of VCU

Strategies: As this project is designed to enhance an intangible; i.e., the morale and pride of the VCU community, we canvassed input from others on how this could be done, what had been tried in the past and what was successful. We enlisted other interested parties at VCU as partners. Specifically, we attempted to:

1. Explore how the project might support VCU's Strategic Plan
2. Research past activities and efforts

3. Determine interested constituents
4. Identify allies and resources
5. Test the design concept by talking to colleagues and our mentors
6. Develop an operational structure and plan

Action Steps:

1. Met with Sam Messmer and Cynthia Schmidt from University Outreach to determine what had previously been done, to air our idea, and to get input regarding their perspectives on the project.
2. Met with Robert Holsworth, Center for Public Policy, to discuss surveys highlighting the external recognition of VCU and its programs, or general lack thereof.
3. Met with Paula Otto, School of Mass Communications, to discuss our concept and get input on appropriate outlets (PBS, TV or radio, Web, etc.) and to enlist the support of the School of Mass Communications.
4. Performed a 'media analysis' to assess which venue would be best.
5. Explored funding options.
6. Outlined potential benefits to VCU.
7. Established mechanisms for identifying and approving vignettes:
 - a. Story solicitation/collection
 - b. 'Story criteria,' i.e., what should be the content of these vignettes
 - c. Editorial Review Board composition
8. Identified next steps.

Outcomes: Bob Holsworth provided hard survey data that supported our contention that VCU suffers from lack of name recognition in the region and that the VCU faculty and staff are not well informed about the overall strengths of the institution. Sam Messmer and Cynthia Schmidt of University Outreach both echoed the sentiment that VCU suffers from a 'branding' deficiency, i.e., we are such a young institution that VCU has less name recognition than MCV. They outlined some of the past and ongoing programs that addressed this issue, but agreed that our project could have a positive impact. Our mentors for the most part gave strong support to the project. Paula Otto, Assistant Director, School of Mass Communications, agreed and offered to assist in the planning and production of our vignettes. We suggested an Editorial Review Board consisting of representatives from the Faculty Senate, University Outreach, Alumni Activities, Staff Senate, and VCU Health Systems, as well as students from Mass Communications. We have outline strategies for identifying good vignettes.

Recommendations: The next steps in this project are outlined briefly below:

1. Solidify plans with collaborators
2. Finalize media outlet decision (television, radio, web)
3. Solidify funding options
4. Select the Editorial Review Board
5. Design and implement marketing campaign
6. Produce a pilot program
7. Secure media sponsor
8. Develop calendar of events

We believe that obvious participants in this project should be the School of Mass Communication, University Outreach, and possibly alumni organizations. Other university and civic organizations can also be approached as future partners and participants.

Conclusions: Regional and local impressions of VCU are compromised by the youth of the institution and its conflicting name branding. Stories of the contributions of VCU personnel to its success are rarely heard or appreciated, and even significant successes of faculty and staff are more likely communicated at the national level than at the regional level. This project is designed to raise the morale and esprit de corps of VCU personnel and enhance the external local and regional image of our institution by sharing the successes and contributions of the university with the public via short vignettes presented on local media. Our work to date has established a venue for this project, made contacts with appropriate divisions of the university, begun to develop strategies for identification of appropriate stories, and begun to approach the question of necessary funding. We believe that within the upcoming six months to a year, our idea can become a reality at VCU, and that it will enhance the name recognition of VCU and the morale of faculty and staff.