

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ICMA Public Awareness Tool Kit Supplement
to URSI 653 Management Seminar Course
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Introduction:

Citizens know what day and at what time their garbage gets picked up, whether it is Thursday morning or Wednesday evening. What people do not know is how much money sanitation represents in their town budget or who persuaded the city to undertake a recycling program. In reality, most of us do not realize that professional management plays an intricate role in delivering public services swiftly and efficiently in a community. To compound this dilemma, we are facing the challenges of a changing workforce and workplace that are being met on the part of young people by a lack of interest in pursuing careers in local government management.

A group of Minnesota State University, Mankato graduate students decided to call attention to these issues during the spring of 2003 in an Urban and Regional Studies (URSI) public management class taught by the author. The course syllabus was designed around the broad purposes of

- developing citizen and youth awareness of the value and importance of professional management in today's communities.
- increasing an overall understanding of media relations for public and non-profit managers.

Project Background:

While previewing possible course texts, I came upon the International City/County Management Association's (ICMA) public awareness campaign tool kit and decided to inquire about using it in the course. I contacted ICMA's public relations director, Michele Frisby, to inquire about using the tool kit as a course supplement. Ms. Frisby was immediately receptive as I further explained my rationale.

The tool kit would serve as the basis for developing a community media campaign to heighten public awareness about the importance of professional management in managing today's complex local government operations and providing residents with the services they need. I had also read Michele Frisby's Public Management article, "What Can Be Done? Attracting Young Adults to Careers in Local Government,"¹ and it struck an all too familiar cord. As a professor who teaches in a university program (URSI)

geared to training professional local government managers, I understand all too well the lack of interest the broader student population has in local government management. As one URSI student described it, “All we had to do is look around in URSI for lack of bodies.” Troubled by these realities, I contemplated what would happen if URSI students put themselves in the shoes of a target audience and developed a presentation that would convey what they thought was needed to nurture youth involvement in and understanding of local government professional management.

Ms. Frisby’s response to my proposed use of the ICMA tool kit was most enthusiastic and she willingly supplied us with a number of kits at no charge. Once I enlisted ICMA’s support, I approached the city administrator of Saint Peter, MN, Todd Prafke, to ask if his community would be interested in having URSI students design a public awareness campaign for it. Saint Peter was very receptive.

Located in southern Minnesota with a population of 10,000, Saint Peter was a particularly interesting city for mounting a campaign about local government services and professional management because it had been struck five years earlier by a monster tornado that devastated a significant portion of the central city area. Today, it is an example of an astonishingly successful renewal and continues to grow and prosper. Therefore, this thriving community provided an excellent example of the benefits of professional city management.

Probably the most ambitious component of the course was designing a color brochure (somewhat like the ICMA model), tailored to the city of Saint Peter. To pursue this aspect, I arranged to meet with the graphics production instructors of a nearby technical college to see if they would be interested in having their students work with the URSI students in developing such a brochure. After several meetings, the South Central Technical College (SCTC) graphics instructorsⁱⁱ agreed that this type of “learn-by-doing” project would provide greater learning benefits than the usual “mock” brochures their students developed. With SCTC on board, we proceeded to plan the project template and discuss production timelines. In 10 weeks, the URSI students had to compile photographs and data, write a brochure narrative, select a brochure layout and proofread and edit the final product. The SCTC students had to design the brochure layout, do color correcting, and print the brochure. In addition to the brochure, the URSI and SCTC students also designed a bookmark style city directory (loosely patterned after ICMA’s Local Government Fact Sheet), which was inserted into the community brochure.

The Project:

From a pedagogical standpoint, this class focused on a myriad of learning experiences, including applied research and out-of-class “learn-by-doing” team assignments. To provide structure for the students and to delineate the tasks at hand, I developed a series of field projects. Some of these were to be completed by student teams; others were to be done individually. Each student received a “class packet” which included typed instructions for the field projects with the grade point value of each. Initially this seemed like the most efficient way of “breaking down” the responsibilities associated with the public awareness campaign. As time went on, I found the parameters of the field projects

were often impossible to predict. For example, in one field project, students were to schedule a visit to Saint Peter, collect photos and data for the community brochure. The city staff had assured us that many high quality photos would be available. When the students arrived, the photos were either in black and white (we wanted color), poor quality, or, when in digital format, saved in files too small to use for graphic reproduction. In this instance, a seemingly simple out-of-class assignment turned out to require students taking new digital photos and searching for professional photographers in the community and requesting permission to use their Saint Peter photographs.

In a snapshot, what follows are some of the tasks contained in the course field projects:

- assembling data and photos for the city brochure.
- editing the ICMA brochure layout design and narrative to Saint Peter.
- developing a city local government fact sheet.
- meeting and coordinating production of the city brochure and fact sheet with the graphics production students at SCTC.
- customizing the PSA video with ending Saint Peter logo tag in place of the ICMA one.
- tailoring the ICMA PSA video narratives to Saint Peter and dubbing a new sound bed for students to re-record new narratives with a university radio station sound technician.
- writing press releases and contacting cable TV stations for PSA coverage.
- writing outreach letters to high school career day counselors.
- revising a PowerPoint presentation and developing an interactive career day presentation for high school students.
- preparing written responses for the ICMA Activity Report.

As the above tasks show, the URSI public awareness campaign project made it necessary to be in contact with a myriad of people and keep track of a demanding production schedule. Clearly an organizational tool was needed early on if the students were to stay on course. In response, I developed a PERT¹ chart as the means to keep us on track. Using the PERT chart also helped the URSI students develop a working partnership with the SCTC students, which, in and of itself, provided a good learning experience for both groups.

Class guest speakers from television, radio and newspaper media, as well as public relations consultants, provided real-world strategies about developing relationships with the media. They also provided us with helpful tips about preparing press releases, tailoring our PSA video to Saint Peter, and contacting a cable TV station, which, in turn, aired our PSA video.

Findings:

Perhaps it was the students themselves who made the most insightful observations about this project. Therefore, what follows are some of their comments.

¹ PERT refers to a management method of controlling and analyzing the project using periodic time reports.

“The ICMA tool kit was a great guide for our project. It gave us a template for each aspect of the PSA campaign and the career day presentation. It may have been difficult to accomplish what we did in that time frame without the ICMA tool kit” (Cedrick Frazier).

“Perhaps the greatest successes for our campaign were the partnerships we developed in the preparation process. By working directly with Saint Peter’s management team, particularly [their] city administrator, we were able to gain insight and utilize many resources that would have otherwise not been available. In addition, by working with the graphic arts students of South Central Technical College, we were able to develop an exceptional brochure that was central to our campaign” (Josh Jones).

“The main purpose of [our] presentation to the Saint Peter City Council during one of their work sessions was to present some of the final products we created for them based on the “Building Communities...It’s No Small Chore” theme. Three notable products presented to them to use were the completely newly created brochure, based loosely on the sample brochure given with the ICMA tool kit. The brochure was tailored with Saint Peter pictures and information about local government managers. The second item presented was a Saint Peter “Fact Sheet” that [was] inserted into the brochure. The fact sheet contain[ed] important dates, and phone numbers pertinent to residents of Saint Peter. The final items presented were the customized PSA video clips. Entirely new audio was recorded [and] tailored for Saint Peter as well as a new ending clip with Saint Peter’s logo and website address. The city council seemed very appreciative of our efforts” (Ken Ondich).

“Our [career day] presentation relied heavily on the use of multimedia tools including; the distribution of brochures with inserts, a tri-fold conference display board set up on a table that provided free, related educational and promotional materials; “grab bags” full of resources, contacts, pencils, lapel pins, and pieces of candy; a PowerPoint presentation; individual speeches; and dialogue with the audience. The target audience was a group of high school age students from out-state Minnesota who were participating in an annual, regional career day. “Incentive” for audience participation included: recognition and opportunities for members of the audience to speak in a non-threatening environment during a small trivia-like game of questions-and-answers about government careers; audience participation with peers of the same-age group/interests; graduate-student mentors; and practitioners—the City of Saint Peter city administrator and veteran professor-instructor Janet Cherrington, Ph.D.; networking opportunities; and alas, candy bars were also distributed” (Michele Koppinger).

“We launched this campaign as a class project for the URSI 653 Management Seminar. The actual campaign was the brainchild of our professor, Dr. Janet Cherrington-Cucore, and her experience in city government was invaluable in navigating the partnership arrangements between SCTC and the City of Saint Peter. In addition, most of the class members came to the Urban Studies Institute from varied backgrounds and could

appreciate that there is a need to raise the visibility of “professional” city managers” (Judy Ziemke).

“This was a big project—in scope and undertaking, especially as it was the ‘first run’ of its kind. The end results were: professionally executed presentations, a four-color² brochure, video clips, and a great educational experience for us all. We also were given the opportunity to learn from some very knowledgeable experts in their fields” (Jillian Connolly & Cindy Froemel).

As the course instructor and from an educator’s perspective, it was disturbing for me to learn that high school counselors do not recognize local government management as a career field. For example, when our class sent an outreach letter to the counselors planning the high school career fair we participated in, we clearly identified our presentation as one targeting professional local government management. However, the career day program listed our session as “Political Science.” It was not until I personally spoke with the career day coordinators and explained the difference that I realized these counselors were unaware there is a difference. *Consequently, ICMA may want to consider this as another reason for the lack of interest in careers in local government management on the part of today’s youth.* In the aftermath, it was rewarding to have the career day counselors promise to change their program category from “political science” to “careers in government” next year. They also asked if we would return to present at their career day fair next year.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

This was a significant undertaking for an average graduate class of a dozen or more students. However, this project was undertaken and completed by a graduate class of seven students. This was also the first endeavor to integrate a studio³ project into the Urban and Regional Studies Institute’s (URSI) city management graduate program. URSI is widely recognized for its studio courses in planning. In addition, this media-relations and building public awareness content was a ‘first-run’ URSI graduate focus and to date has not been listed as a repeat course.

In terms of suggestions to improve the ICMA tool kit, the following suggestions are excerpts from the full student responses located in the Activity Report Survey found in the appendix.

Public Service Announcements:

“We had limited success with the radio and television PSAs, in part we believe, because the audience (including the local media) doesn’t quite understand why professional management needs to be advertised. While the “it’s no small chore” theme is a great way

² Refers to full process color printing which requires the paper to pass through the press printing the colors black, cyan, magenta, and yellow. From these four colors all other colors can be attained.

³ The term “studio” refers to an applied research project in which much of the work is accomplished through out-of-class assignments in a team-centered environment.

to explain what professional managers do, we got the impression that the general public is somewhat confused by advertisements promoting professional government management. These tools are excellent for presentations to captive audiences, but in regards to receiving much air time on local stations, we are less optimistic.”

Brochure:

“The brochure was designed to be passed out “as is” with a personalized local fact sheet. We determined early in the process that we needed to customize the brochure because it made too much reference to ICMA. Most city managers would make better use of a brochure that highlighted *their* city’s professional management.... For cities that choose this option, it would be helpful for ICMA to point out that a source of pictures in digital format is best and the pictures need to be very large in memory size to reproduce well. In addition, cities might find it helpful to have on hand a list of photographers in the community. For cities or classes without the option of partnering, it would be nice to have a simpler version of the brochure to customize on a PC. We got a template in Quark⁴ for the brochure after asking but it might be helpful to have a simpler version, formatted in a Microsoft Word already available in the supplied materials.

Local Government Fact Sheet:

“Depending on the audience, the local government fact sheet suggestions are either right on target or too lengthy. Our class did not use the suggested tips, but rather developed a bookmark-sized card that listed city offices, city and private services and area attractions. This bookmark seemed to us to be the most convenient method of conveying information and made the brochure friendlier to area citizens and for use with economic development activities.”

Video/Audio:

“While the ICMA tool kit indicates that the video clips can be edited simply by placing a ‘tag’ at the end of the clips, in reality it is not that easy. For example, while working with the university radio station technician, we learned that the audio and video clips both needed to be exactly 29 seconds long. This required listening to and selecting a sound bed of appropriate length to record underneath the revised narratives. Once the audio was recorded we needed to match it to the video clips, which brought a second problem. To edit the clips we had to digitize them on campus using Adobe Premier 6.0. The quality of the digitized video clips left a lot to be desired and they were definitely not network broadcasting quality. A Beta version of the video clips PSA’s would have given a better quality. However, we did not have the resources on campus to use/edit the Beta video.

Recommendation: Provide the video clip PSA in a .AVI format of very high quality on CD. The .AVI format is readily editable in Adobe Premier and/or Windows Movie Maker 2 (both these were used in editing the video clip PSAs for this project). Note: Although ICMA did provide us with a digital version of the videos, they were of very low “webviewing” quality and were unusable.”

⁴ Quark is a graphics specific area composition software.

All materials provided were a great starting point for this project, but there was a lot of learning we had to go through to make the edits for the video and audio clips because our resources were limited and none of us have a background with this technical side of the project materials.”

Press Releases:

“A sample press release would have been a great help when it came time to write a press release for the completion of the project (note also that City letterhead should be used for this press release). In direct relation to the sample press release, it should be advised that a list of all media outlets in the market area be assembled. This is a crucial step for the press release, as the sender of the press release needs to know where to send it.”

Career Day Presentation:

“During our career day presentation, it was impossible to use both a PowerPoint presentation and show the video clips we edited at the same time. The audiovisual equipment we had access to only allowed one audio/visual source to be used at one time. We were therefore forced to stop playing the video clips in order to proceed with the PowerPoint portion of the career day presentation.” Perhaps the tool kit could include a “heads-up” to check for this type of equipment limitation.

In conclusion, this project came about through a partnership between a graduate level URSI class, an SCTC technical college Graphics Production class, and the City of Saint Peter, MN. Knowing first-hand the lack of knowledge about local government professional managers as well as examining the topical literature led to a student outreach to speak at a regional high school career day fair.

Overall, the public awareness tool kit provided an excellent supplement to the URSI 653 Management Seminar course. For example, it provided excellent guidelines for developing a PSA campaign for the community of Saint Peter, MN, and also a helpful template to plan our career day and city official presentations. The tool kit, and the additional resources provided by Michele Frisby, made it possible for the URSI and SCTC students to produce a high-quality, personalized four-color brochure and fact sheet for the city of Saint Peter, MN—all within a ten-week period. This brochure will be made available to Saint Peter residents and used by the city as an economic development tool. In addition, the tool kit provided URSI students the materials to customize a PSA video for Saint Peter, which was aired by a local cable TV station after city council meetings, and weekly “state-of-the-city” broadcasts by the city administrator.

A PowerPoint template provided URSI students the framework to personalize a career day presentation for out-state Minnesota high school students. Further, URSI students have been invited to return to next year’s career day fair. More importantly, URSI students demonstrated a significant commitment to these students by providing their personal email addresses to students who had additional questions or wanted some mentoring.

Class guest speakers from television, radio and newspaper media, as well as public relations consultants,ⁱⁱⁱ provided students with real-world strategies to develop their

relationships with the media. MSU personnel provided technical assistance to edit the ICMA video, add a new sound bed and record Saint Peter specific narratives.

As previously stated, this was an ambitious project that required teamwork and the coordination of many participants. As a studio project, it enjoined students at the graduate level and technical college level with Saint Peter's management team. Perhaps the most rewarding (and unanticipated) outcome was the creation of a true learning community. Students built broader real-world alliances and nurtured friendships and a meaningful partnership was forged between the university, the technical college and the city of Saint Peter.

Lastly, in May of 2003, Jillian Connolly, one of the URSI 653 graduate students, was awarded a scholarship to attend the Minnesota City/County Management Association conference in Brainerd, MN. At the suggestion of David Osberg, the Minnesota ICMA Public Awareness Campaign Coordinator, the author accompanied Jillian to the conference where they showcased a tri-fold conference display board and the class PSA video.



This photo shows ICMA's Executive Director, the author, Jillian Connolly, and Ross Hoff, ICMA's Conference Director, in front of the display board. The author looks forward to further discussing this project and innovative ways to use the ICMA public awareness tool kit at the 2003 national ICMA conference in September 2003.

[Robert O'Neill, ICMA Executive Director; Janet Cherrington, URSI Professor; Jillian Connolly, URSI graduate student; Ross Hoff, ICMA Conference Director]

NOTES

ⁱ Frisby, Michele, in “What Can Be Done Attracting Young Adults to Careers in Local Government,” *Public Management* (January/February 2003), pp.8-14.

ⁱⁱ SCTC Graphic Production instructors and participating classes were Gale Bigbee--Advanced Color Separation; Elizabeth Madsen-- Advanced Electronic Publishing; Neil Nurre--Advanced Offset Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Guest speakers (in alphabetical order) were: Joseph Breiter, Breiter Media Group; Deb Fleming, Editor Mankato Free Press; James Gullickson, KMSU Radio; Derrick Hinds, News Director KEYC-TV Mankato; David Osberg, City Administrator and ICMA Public Awareness Campaign Coordinator for MN; Todd Prafke, City Administrator Saint Peter, MN; Shelly Schulz, Public Information Officer City of Mankato.