

2014

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Recommended Citation

Moeller, Erik (2014) "Purdue University Dance Marathon: Creating Value for PUDM and the Student Community," *Purdue Journal of Service-Learning and International Engagement*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.

DOI: 10.5703/1288284315495

Available at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/pjsl/vol1/iss1/12>

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PURDUE JOURNAL OF SERVICE-LEARNING AND INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Purdue University Dance Marathon: Creating Value for PUDM and the Student Community

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This past semester I had the pleasure of participating in a class offered in the Consumer Sciences department, CSR 315, which gave us the opportunity to take on a service-learning project. The project required each team, composed of three to four members, to seek out a local business or organization on campus that was in need of outside assistance to improve the overall function. After identifying the needs we were tasked with presenting the relevance of them to the organization. After observing, interviewing, and working within the organization we were able to come up with solutions to help the organization at an internal level. We then were able to put together a presentation for not only our class, but also the vice president of the Purdue University Dance Marathon.

Purdue University Dance Marathon (PUDM) is a fast growing and successful organization. Established in 2005, PUDM has garnered more than \$1 million for the children and families served at Riley Hospital for Children from the past 9 dance marathons. As reported on the PUDM web site, the organization has grown from 100 dancers in its first year to over 2,000 in the November 2013 marathon. PUDM has impacted the success of Riley Hospital so much that the hospital has named a new room in their cancer center after the organization. It is because of this rapid growth that we chose to work with PUDM. It was also important to us that we could find an organization with a purpose for which we truly cared. Assisting PUDM was a great choice because we knew that the organization was not exclusive to Purdue University's campus—there are many other Dance Marathons from which we could compare and learn.

These larger marathons acted as a guide for the Purdue organization in order to help it continue its growth.

Over the course of the semester, we participated in several different activities in order to better understand the operations of the organization. We talked with multiple executive members, attended meetings held by different committees, and, ultimately, attended the Marathon. Each event gave us better insight to help determine a more successful plan for the success of the organization. Many members stressed that success required the support of larger businesses, but they had already put together a committee directly for that and we chose to focus on a different aspect.

We examined more effective ways of selling merchandise for Purdue University Dance Marathon and thus raising visibility, awareness, and funding. The process was based on buying the products with out-of-pocket funding and then selling them to whomever wanted the items. We paired up with a company that a member had worked with previously, and designed a new shirt for the Purdue organization. Most importantly this company was willing to donate a portion of the proceeds directly back to PUDM. We took shirt orders and payment prior to ordering the shirts from the supplier so that we only ordered as many shirts as were needed. In doing the shirt order this way, PUDM did not have to fund the purchase of shirts that may never be sold. These shirts not only helped raise money, but also provided advertising for the organization.

The experience of working with PUDM was mutually beneficial, as it helped our team in applying sales and marketing skills and ideas discussed in class. We were able to take the role of an outside consultant and give a fresh perspective to the organization. It was also helpful to see how a large-scale organization operated and the importance that every member had in its operations.