

Future Challenges: Public Relations Team Spring 2016

AguaClara research teams design water treatment processes that improve water quality for resource poor communities. However it is the PR team that makes sure that their accomplishments are appreciated and recognized widely by potential members, clients, or stakeholders both on campus and beyond. In addition, the PR team works to convince new students to join the team while fostering teamwork in the lab.

The PR team also works on posting updates to AguaClara social media accounts, recruiting new team members, creating subteam spotlights, managing merchandise sales, and creating documents for managing money transactions within the Public Relations team. The more public awareness and support AguaClara has both on and off campus, the more impact AguaClara's research will have towards providing safe water to communities in need of safe drinking water.

There were a few problems that the Public Relations Team faced this semester that could be either eliminated or changed for the future. Over the course of the semester, the Public Relations Team was presented with many different project ideas and events to attend. Unfortunately, with only two team members and a few already busy Team Leads, many of these ideas and events had to be cut down because of insufficient Public Relations Team members in order to accomplish all of these goals. Additionally, there was much to be learned from the fund-raiser. For a first attempt, the team ultimately did well but learned that there was much to improve for publicizing the event and understanding how much money would relatively come in for a given number of participants at a place like Café Pacific.

The most general conclusion for the Public Relations Team this semester was the need for a complete restructuring of the team operates itself. The Team Leads and Public Relations Team members had decided change a few key elements of the team. The Public Relations Team as a whole had developed to do work beyond actual Public Relations. Modeling after other Cornell Project Teams, for instance—CU Air, with a business team that encompassed Public Relations as well as other responsibilities. There was also discussion of creating roles within the new team (i.e.: Business Team Coordinator, Public Relations Head, Graphic and Merchandise Designer, etc) to create a better system to assigning tasks. This would also help to create roles for each team member, playing on their strengths and helping prospective members for the team to understand their responsibilities. The Public Relations team could also benefit from changing the subteam advisor to one of the general team leads. Since much of the projects needed approval through a chain of command (all team members, then subteam leader, then AguaClara Team Leads), it often ended up taking a much longer time to complete tasks which decreased overall Public Relations Team efficiency. Recruitment for the Public Relations Team had also been determined as something that needed special attention since many potential team members were not within the usual pool of Engineering students who AguaClara typically advertised to. In preparation, Fall 2016 Team Leads had encouraged prospective Public Relations Team members to look into joining the project team much earlier than the typical recruitment period at the very beginning of each semester.

In the coming semesters, the Public Relations Team planned to continue improving current efforts and to create new promotional opportunities. First, the team hoped to refine the budgeting process after it applied for funding through SAFC this year. The insights and errors made in this year's budget request will serve as guidelines on how to best manage and request a budget. Moreover, the Public Relations Team will keep on producing regular Public Relations publications, such as the newsletter and the social media updates, with higher efficiency and impact after learning about the most effective editing procedures. The special events hosted by AguaClara this semester, like the Open House and Fundraiser, allowed AguaClara to increase presence on campus and should be hosted again next year. Yet, the Public Relations team will work on amending the structure and advertising process to make each event more impactful.

On the other hand, various creative ideas were not executed this semester due to the limited amount of human resource and money in the Public Relations Team. There were two main ideas that had enormous potential and the team should consider for next semester. The first idea was an awareness event with another on-campus organizations, focusing on environment or social change. The Public Relations Team reached out to Take Back the Tap during this semester but due to the amount of tasks, the team never had the opportunity to collaborate with the organization. Partnering with another group could extend AguaClara's reach on campus and promote the great cause of AguaClara to a larger audience. The second idea would be to reach out to media contact. Reaching out to media contact was not prioritized this semester; the Public Relations Team already stored a database of contacts and would like to take advantage of this document to connect with local media and invite them to share about AguaClara's work. The AguaClara Public Relations teams have laid foundation for both these actions. In the future, these new projects can be easily started, potentially helping AguaClara grow in exciting ways.