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ChangeFest: Creating Significant Positive Change in Just One Day

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ChangeFest: creating significant positive change in just one day
By: Elana Rivkin
Film Media

Introduction
As a college student, I have come to recognize that there is a lack of intrinsic motivation on college campuses. Too often do students only take part in the repetitive routine of going to class, doing their homework, seeing their friends, and repeat. These needs lead to a stronger presence of student involvement and a desire to take advantage of opportunities outside of students’ comfort zones that challenge the status quo.

Students are the future, and if each and every person were to discover and act upon a passion that is bigger than themselves, society would consist of equally ambitious and passionate individuals. Our current education system often misses the mark on helping students build real-life skills that will be valuable in the workplace, such as: problem-solving, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and leadership. By guiding students towards experiences that will help build 21st-century skills, they will stand out to employers more. As society continues to progress with technological advancements and constant discoveries, newer generations need to have the knowledge and preparation to be adaptable and valuable in this ever-changing world.

ChangeFest was created as a group-wide passion project founded by the members of Thrive URI. ChangeFest’s mission is to unite Rhode Island’s college students and empower them to become positive change agents in their community. The goals of the event are to develop multiple social enterprises that positively impact Rhode Island and beyond, increase collaboration between colleges and disciplines, increase innovation and ability in community-based problem-solving, and better academic performance and long-term professional success.

What We Did
ChangeFest is a day-long, hackathon-type event where students have the power to make real change on their campuses. Students work in teams of those who live to find solutions to problems they are passionate about. They work with knowledgeable mentors and meet people from colleges all around Rhode Island. What makes it so exciting is that students get to develop and present real ideas that could potentially help improve a problem.

In 2016, ChangeFest was first held at Brown University, where students from all over the United States arrived for a day of innovation. My role that first year on the day of the event was to serve as the head videographer and photographer. As the background role, I was blown away by what the students were able to accomplish in a short amount of time. During this year’s ChangeFest at URI, I took on a much more prominent role as the coordinator of the whole day. I facilitated all activities and ensured throughout the day that each portion ran smoothly from one segment to another.

My Personal Role
As the President of Thrive and a co-founder of ChangeFest, I have helped pioneer the event’s creation and act as a support system for the whole organization. I ran weekly meetings for the entire fall and spring semesters, where we broke up into four core teams: organization, outreach, finance, and design, and worked diligently on tasks leading up to the event. I also held executive board meetings every other week to keep the board members fully engaged with what is going on behind the scenes. By allowing these messages to trickle down to the rest of the organization, I personally met with various faculty members on campus, such as President Dooley, Dorothy Collins, and Dr. Forster-Holt, to invite them to partake in the event.

I made it my mission to push the members of Thrive outside their comfort zone to discover new skills and passions that they hadn’t previously explored. I worked to identify people’s individual strengths and help them to maximize these strengths and enhance their area of expertise. Through various nontraditional techniques, and utilizing all of my networks on and off campus, I have brought a team of dedicated people together within the URI community.

Conclusion
ChangeFest has completely changed the person I am today and has influenced the passions and goals that I have set for myself. Through attending the event, I have further developed many skills, both personally and professionally. I am looking to transition out of my position within Thrive. I look forward to seeing how the executive board will use the foundation that we have placed in the years to come. I truly believe that inspiring those around me to not only better themselves, but also their communities, is one of my main purposes in life.

ChangeFest prepares college students to be capable of much more than they may think. With the right resources and motivation, small teams of students can make tangible change in just a few hours. The projects that thrive at ChangeFest have the potential to make significant improvements to college campuses and society as a whole. This year’s winning project, Simbolic, is a smart recycling system that produces water from drinking cups and therefore reduces the use of plastic. It is my hope that ChangeFest will influence more and more students to volunteer for college students. I plan to bring something like this to the outside world to continue to motivate people to collaborate and use their voices to make positive change happen.

Acknowledgements
I would like to thank the Honors Program for providing me with the opportunity to create my own project. Also, my sponsor, Dan Lavine, from the RI Food Center for always being supportive and willing to help.

ChangeFest Metrics

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th># of Registrants</th>
<th># of Attendees</th>
<th># of Teams</th>
<th>Participating Schools</th>
<th>Keynote Speakers</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Funders</th>
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<td>83</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Dr. David Dooley, Congressman David Cicilline</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
<td>Founders League, URI Office of the President</td>
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<td>URI</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>URI, Roger Williams, Bryant, PC, Salve Regina</td>
<td>Dr. David Dooley, Ety Founding Partner: Matt Stinchcomb</td>
<td>$4,700</td>
<td>URI Student Senate, URI Office of the President, Office of Community, Equity, &amp; Diversity</td>
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What Worked
There were many aspects of this year’s event that made it successful:
- Easy registration process
- Hosting at URI
- Length of event
- Organized and structured schedule
- Keynote Speaker (URI President David Dooley, and Founding Partner of Etzy, Matt Stinchcomb)
- Helpful mentors
- Good mixture of students from various universities
- Small teams of 3-5 students
- Custom merchandise – reusable water bottles, laptop stickers, t-shirts
- Snapchat filter
- Superlatives
- Cash prizes – 1st place: $500, 2nd place: $300, 3rd place: $200
- Increased desire to make substantial change (see chart below)

Core Learning Outcomes
Throughout the development process of the event, I kept very specific and personal learning outcomes in mind:
- Discovering how I can serve as a change agent in society, while simultaneously helping others make positive change of their own
- Guiding students towards building their campus communities and beyond
- Learning about what college students really care about and aspects of their college experience they want to improve
- Further developing my leadership and delegation skills
- Further developing my facilitation skills to enhance my ability to work with different types of people
- Recognizing my areas of improvement as a leader
- Enhancing my public speaking and hosting skills
- Learning to be adaptable when faced with unpredictable obstacles
- Pushing to myself that change is possible in just one day

What Can Be Improved
While there are many aspects of the event that were successful, there is ample room for improvement.
- Prior to:
  - More advertising on campus & social media
  - Better communication to other universities
  - Better explanation of event to students
  - Better advertising, ordered and designed earlier
  - Funds raised earlier
  - Lower registration needed for mentors, volunteers, & spectators
- Day of:
  - More efficient check-in process
  - Tasklist activities to connect the whole group
  - More cross-proprietors of food vendors
  - More videographers to get footage throughout the whole day
  - Better established volunteers’ roles
  - Presentations sent earlier to avoid technical difficulties during pitch
  - Voting system (need judging in the future)