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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

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND

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. There needs to be 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 purpose that is bigger than themselves, society would consist of equally ambitious and hardworking 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 reliable 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 interest and ability in community-based problem-solving, and better academic performance and long-term professional success.



My Personal Role

As the President of Thrive and a co-founder of ChangeFest, I helped pioneer the event's creation and acted 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 committees: 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, to allow those messages to trickle down to the rest of the organization. I personally met with various faculty members on campus, such as President Dooley, Kathy 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 tapped into. I worked to identify people's individual strengths and help them to maximize these strengths and enhance their areas of improvement. Through various recruitment techniques, and utilizing all of my networks on and off campus, I successfully brought likeminded people together within the URI community.

In 2016, ChangeFest was first held at Brown University, where students from all over Rhode Island 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. While I took a more background role, I was blown away by what the students were developing 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 emceed throughout the day, ensuring that each portion ran smoothly from one segment to another.

What Worked

There were many aspects of this year's event that made it successful:

- Easy registration process
- Free event
- Hosting at URI
- Length of event
- Organized and structured schedule
- Keynote Speakers (URI President David Dooley, and Founding Partner of Etsy, Matt Stinchcomb)
- Helpful mentors
- Good mixture of students from various universities
- Small teams of 3-5 students
- Custom merchandise – reusable water bottles, laptop stickers, bracelets
- Snapchat filter
- Superlatives
- Cash prizes – first place: \$500, second place: \$300, third place: \$300
- 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 bettering 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
- Proving to myself that change is possible in just one day

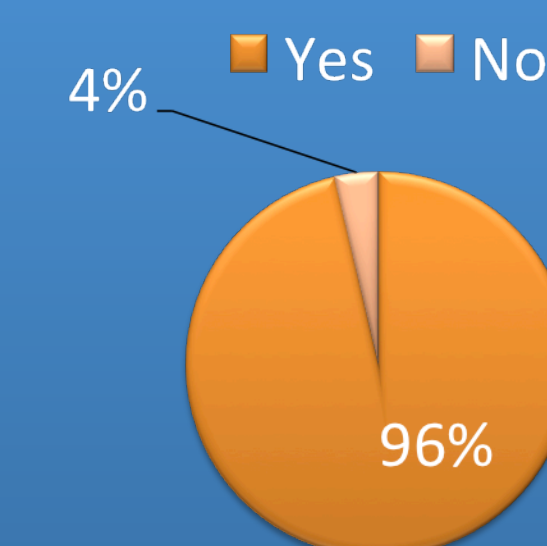
What We Did

ChangeFest is a day-long, intercollegiate event where students have the power to make real change on their campuses. Students work in teams of three to five to find solutions to a campus issue they are passionate about. They work with knowledgeable mentors and meet people from colleges all around Rhode Island.

After working all day to develop an innovative solution to a campus problem, there is a pitch contest where an audience voting process determines the top three teams. The winning teams receive funding to bring their ideas to life. With topics ranging from Diversity & Inclusion, Sustainability, Physical Health, Mental Health, Campus Involvement, and Education, students have a wide variety of issues to tackle.



Do you feel more motivated to improve your campus community?



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
- Consistent communication to other universities
- Better explanation of event to students
- Promotional materials ordered and designed earlier
- Funds raised earlier
- Better registration established for mentors, volunteers, & spectators

Day of:

- More efficient check-in process
- Icebreaker activities to connect the whole group
- More accurate proportions of food needed
- More videographers to get footage throughout the whole day
- Better established volunteers' roles
- Presentations sent earlier to avoid technical difficulties during pitches
- Voting system (need judges in the future)



Conclusion

ChangeFest has completely shaped the person I am today and has influenced the passions and goals that I have set for myself. Through co-founding this event, I have further developed many skills, both personally and professionally. As I begin to transition out of my position within Thrive, I look forward to seeing how the new executive board utilizes 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 proves that college students are capable of much more than they may think. With the right resources to innovate, small teams of students can make tangible change in just a few hours. The projects that have been developed at ChangeFest have the potential to make significant improvements to college campuses around the globe. This year's winning project, Simbiotics, is a smart recycling system that provides incentives for students to recycle and reduce their use of plastic. It is my hope that ChangeFest becomes more than just an event 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.

ChangeFest Metrics

Date	Location	# of Registrants	# of Attendees	# of Teams	Participating Schools	Keynote Speakers	Budget	Funders
4/23/16	Brown	83	60	6	Brown, URI, Bryant, RISD, RIC, Roger Williams	Dr. David Dooley, Congressman David Cicilline	\$2,000	Founders League, URI Office of the President
2/25/17	URI	97	71	7	URI, Roger Williams, Bryant, PC, Salve Regina	Dr. David Dooley, Etsy Founding Partner: Matt Stinchcomb	\$4,700	URI Student Senate, URI Office of the President, Office of Community, Equity, & Diversity



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