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The University of Dayton

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UD STUDENTS GAIN PUBLIC RELATIONS SKILLS

DAYTON, Ohio, March 30, 1989--A costumed kidney danced outside Kennedy Union on the University of Dayton campus last semester. It was just one of the public relations gambits that Mel Weinberg's students dreamed up to help nonprofit agencies.

Each semester, students enrolled in Weinberg's public relations workshop spend half their class time assisting nonprofit agencies. Working in teams, the students identify a nonprofit organization's needs and develop a public relations plan. The Kidney Foundation, Coalition on Smoking, Multiple Sclerosis, March of Dimes, Arcade Square, Miami Valley Arts Council and Catholic Social Services were among the agencies that "hired" the students' public relations firms.

"Students find it gives them a good feel for working with nonprofit agencies, which have to be real creative to get publicity," Weinberg said.

For example, seniors Meg Diedrichs, Gina Antonelli and Marisa Soto, working together as "Perceptions Unlimited," helped the Downtown Dayton Association promote the Dayton Holiday Festival, a month-long celebration. Innovative Images, a firm formed by seniors Katharine McClary, Eric Boysk and Monee Sternby, worked to increase community awareness and volunteer recruitment of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Greater Dayton. With help from a local advertising agency, the students launched a direct-mail campaign targeted at the average potential Big Brother or Sister. The students also persuaded police and fire departments in Kettering, Oakwood and Centerville to display brochures for Big Brothers/Big Sisters. They developed this strategy after officials rejected their plan to stuff paycheck envelopes with brochures.

That's one lesson the workshop teaches, Weinberg noted. In addition to learning how to write proposals and contracts, "the students run up against brick walls and have to re strategize their campaigns."