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REFLECTION ESSAY

I came into MEJO 332 with a very rough idea of what a “service-learning class” was. I grew up on community service; I founded and ran a supply drive throughout high school, raising thousands of dollars in school supplies and shoes for my local community. Coming into this class, I had plenty of experience working with nonprofit organizations. However, I quickly learned that my previous understanding of community service was only a fraction of what goes into daily operations.

It is safe to say that I was extremely nervous about our group’s first meeting with Kristina Isaac and Nancy Bono. Again, I had volunteer experience, but working with Note in the Pocket was the second communications position I held after my internship this last summer. My fears and doubts about my abilities were diminished within five minutes of talking with Kristina and Nancy. By the end of the meeting, I knew I wanted to produce meaningful work for an organization that is so meaningful to the communities it serves. During this meeting, our four group members were each assigned a “position” of sorts, with the title of graphic designer being handed to me. This scared me to death. I used to run a baseball fan page but always struggled with my graphics. I knew the only way to ease my fear of producing low-quality work was to keep tweaking and learning from what did not work. I did that. I spent hours on graphics for a holiday-themed email series targeting current and former Note in the Pocket volunteers and convincing them to commit to monthly or one-time financial contributions. Eventually, I overcame the challenge of low-quality work to produce fun and engaging graphics for the email campaign. I have meant to work on my graphic design skills for the post-grad world, so taking on this position for the whole semester benefited my growth as a student and professional.

The most rewarding part of this service-learning experience was seeing how our group’s hard work impacted the organization. Many of the volunteers that Note in the Pocket emailed our campaign to reached out and complimented us on how visually appetizing the copy and graphics were. The campaign also led to thousands of dollars in monthly commitments that will hopefully renew for months and even years to come. Knowing that our work had a genuine impact on the lives of everyone at Note in the Pocket is a feeling that is hard to beat and makes the whole experience valuable and close to my heart. Almost all of the class was valuable, but if I were to nitpick, I would suggest changing our daily assignments to all of them being required to correlate with our clients. The clients love to see any work we produce, either for them or for class. It would benefit everyone if the work were applied directly to our service-learning.

Note in the Pocket does a great job of being on top of its communication game. However, I think there is a large gap between the organization and its competitors regarding social media. It only employs three social media platforms daily, when it should try to be active on at least five platforms (currently inactive on YouTube and X). While some posts on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn are engaging, I suggest the organization follow the same graphics style for all posts, excluding photos taken at in-person events or one of the warehouse/drop-off locations. I would also encourage Note in the Pocket to put a donation button somewhere on each newsletter they send out. While this may seem annoying to

recipients, they understand that the organization's daily operations run off financial and clothing contributions.

I recommend that Note in the Pocket remain an APPLES client/community partner. The organization, Kristina and Nancy were unbelievably positive when working with us and encouraging us to produce our best work. They understood our sometimes hectic schedules as students at a prestigious journalism and media school and worked to be as flexible as possible with us. They communicated with us promptly and effectively and were transparent about any changes to our work that they thought were necessary. Most importantly, they were proud to work with our group and trusted that we would produce meaningful deliverables. They were not shy about notifying their email recipients of the service-learning project we were undertaking and were excited to show off our work.

Overall, this semester's experience is one that I am proud of and happy I participated in. I got to apply my studies at Hussman to a real-world position and do it for a dedicated nonprofit, something I have always been passionate about. Note in the Pocket treated my group and me with the upmost respect, and it will always have a place in my heart when I think about my time spent at UNC.