Marketing Students Promote Awareness of Juvenile Diabetes through Academic Service Learning Campaign

December 16, 2009

Freshmen studying Principles of Marketing with Andrea Licari, D.P.S., took a different approach to Academic Service-Learning during the fall semester. There were no soup kitchens, no tutoring at elementary schools or volunteer work at hospices. Instead these undergraduates tackled the challenges of juvenile—or type 1—diabetes awareness in a real-world marketing campaign.

Their objective: to educate a targeted population of children, caregivers and medical professionals on the warning signs of this often misdiagnosed disease.

Working with non-profit organizations to create sustainable change for the common good is one of the hallmarks of a St. John’s education. Through Academic Service Learning—in which a service activity is incorporated into the curriculum—students better understand, learn and retain classroom theories through community service and experiential learning. At the same time, their efforts on behalf of the disadvantaged reflect the University’s Vincentian mission of service.

In this instance, more than 80 marketing students paired up in teams to design a comprehensive strategy to reach the 10 million people affected by diabetes each year and the additional 24 million individuals who are unaware of their medical status or how to cope with this illness. Students in Dr. Licari’s Discover New York course for the Physician Assistant program as well as those in Professor Thom McCarthy’s advertising research class contributed to the effort.

“The students had to target specific groups,” says the CPS Professor. “The goal of this presentation was to demonstrate an understanding of the theories learned in class and to connect
it with this at-risk community. By learning how to market a product or service, they were empowered to not only impact society’s perception but in turn to alter society’s behavior.”

getting the word out

Generally diagnosed in children, teenagers and young adults, doctors are unclear what causes juvenile or insulin-dependent diabetes, a disorder in which the body has difficulty regulating blood sugar levels.

Dr. Licari invited two physicians highly recognized in the field of juvenile diabetes—Drs. Robert Rapaport, Director of the Division of Pediatric Endocrinology and Diabetes at Mount Sinai Medical Center, and Dennis Cary, Director at North Shore-LIJ Schneider Children’s Hospital—to kick-off the initial promotion with an hour-long presentation on the facts and myths associated with the illness.

“The doctors acknowledged the problem and our students were able to execute a well-laid out campaign to Mount Sinai Medical College,” notes Dr. Licari. “They were able to participate in a service-learning project in which they effectively helped society and witnessed how their contribution will make a difference.”

The freshmen unveiled their marketing plans to Dr. Licari and their classmates in November, which was National Diabetes Awareness Month. The “Picture Me” campaign submitted by Danielle Rodriguez (group leader), Victoria Galperina, Elise Ourso, Joanna Trumino, Paul Lamm, Rohan Bhasin, Dana Latipova, Angelo McEneaney and Kevin Kulikowski was selected to present before a panel of experts at the Juvenile Diabetes conference in 2010 at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City.