



Newhouse School

1forAll & Middle Tennessee State University

Syracuse University, First Amendment Campaigns

Led by Dr. Regina Luttrell & Dr. Kyla Garrett Wagner

Across America, understanding of the historical, philosophical, and constitutional principles underlying the First Amendment is in critical need. There has not been a more powerful and disruptive force in modern history than the attack on freedom of speech. Regularly, American's are deluged with a steady stream of misinformation, disinformation, fake news, and misaligned online influence. Today's student is not prepared for citizenship without an understanding of the First Amendment and command of the freedoms it protects. Further, recent national events have set in opposition values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and freedom of expression against each other, when they should be mutually reinforcing. According to the American Council on Education, while college students believe in the principles of the First Amendment, many are willing to entertain restrictions when they see conflicts with other values and beliefs.¹

To that end, PRL 425 Public Relations Cases and Campaigns at Syracuse University set out to move from apathy to rich conversations and action, ultimately empowering students, and others to make meaning of the current environment and to create positive change on university campuses and their surrounding communities. The discussions, insights, and debates these campus-wide campaigns generated over the fall semester of 2021 garnered a stronger understanding of the core issues and steered us toward improved programming aimed at protecting the First Amendment while upholding values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Team 1: Free Speech Story Hour

Student Team: Mia Juliano, Anika Narain, Connor Breen, Katherine Hausler, and Olivia Cammarata

Founded in 2015, *Drag Queen Story Hour* is an initiative born out of the drag and LGBTQ+ community that “celebrates reading through the glamorous art of drag.” The organization offers Storytime at libraries and community spaces where members, dressed in drag, read to children to help expose them not only to new books but also to sexual diversity and gender fluidity. But in public libraries throughout the United States, there is an ongoing fight to censor these speakers.

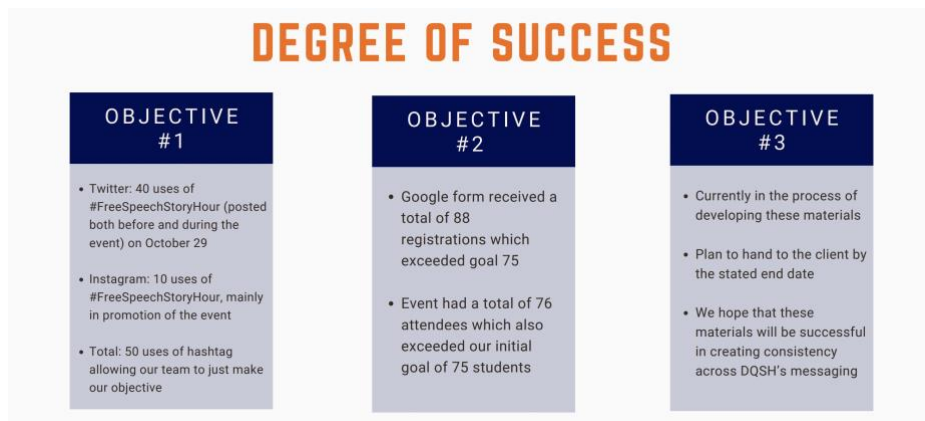


In early 2020, the Minnesota state legislature introduced a bill calling for the outright ban of *Drag Queen Story Hour* from all public libraries and mandated the loss of all government funds if a library were to host the group. Similarly, the state legislatures of Tennessee and Missouri proposed bills to prevent libraries from hosting *Drag Queen Story Hour* by requiring libraries to create “parental review boards” in which local citizens are given the power to exclude (aka, censor) children from access to books and activities which the committee considers “inappropriate.” Even without the force of government action,

¹ <https://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Diversity-Inclusion/Inclusion-and-Freedom-of-Expression.aspx>

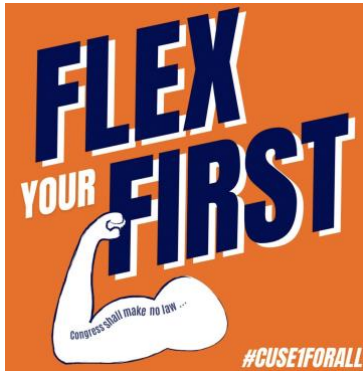
community backlash has forced *Drag Queen Story Hour* to leave libraries and move to private spaces. In June 2021, for example, a scheduled reading by *Drag Queen Story Hour* at Taylor Library in New Hampshire was canceled after threats of protest and hateful messages were sent to the library staff. It remains to be seen what will happen to the proposed legislation but without question, these actions by state governments and local citizens are blatant acts of discrimination and pose direct threats to free speech and expression. Further, it is not just the voices of *Drag Queen Story Hour* that are in danger. This leaves public librarians in the challenging position of standing up for free speech or abiding by a law that thwarts their mission of providing access to a broad range of materials and services to people of all ages and backgrounds.

The censorship of *Drag Queen Story Hour* brought together multiple free speech issues: suppression of sexual expression, discrimination against minority speakers, and regulation of speech in public libraries. This fall we hosted a campus-wide event – Free Speech Story Hour which helped raise awareness of the freedoms of the First Amendment among students. Students engaged in a discussion about the aforementioned free speech issues and their intersection within the LGBTQ+ community. The objective of this event was to provide the campus and surrounding community with an opportunity to engage with *Drag Queen Story Hour* and free speech scholars to educate the audience about free expression and the impacts of regulation and censorship like the kind experienced by *Drag Queen Story Hour*.



Overall, this was a successful campaign for 1 For All--the free speech center at Middle Tennessee State University--in working with #Cuse1ForAll to spread awareness of the First Amendment amongst students on the Syracuse University campus. After conducting this campaign, our team reached the conclusion that there was more awareness than expected surrounding First Amendment rights and the LGBTQ+ community's fight for equality. More specifically, there was a clear understanding about free speech among Newhouse students, as they were a key public in this campaign. This could be due to the significant emphasis that the Newhouse school puts on the expression of First Amendment rights. At our event, our team saw that students had some general knowledge on free speech through their engagement during the panel. There were also a great number of thought-provoking tweets surrounding the First Amendment that illustrated the awareness that already exists. SU college students appeared to be more informed on the topic than we had thought they would be in our initial research stage.

Team 2 - Flex Your First



Student Team: Catherine Burns, Casey Hurley, Brianna Kennedy, Cara Anne Sheedy, and Nancy Woods

With one major goal in mind, to spread awareness about the crucial connection between First Amendment rights and social justice activism, including the women’s movement and civil rights movement, the team conducted extensive research to determine target demographics and ideal tactics with which to reach them. A social media campaign, in-person tabling activities and an engaging panelist discussion resulted in a broad reach of students, faculty, and guests at Syracuse University. By contextualizing the struggles and accomplishments of the women’s and civil rights movements throughout history, the team’s goal was to raise awareness and educate the campus community about the power of the First Amendment and the role it continues to play in these social justice movements today. The success of the project was measured through both qualitative and quantitative methods and used the full range of paid, earned, shared, and owned media. To that end, we hosted tabling events, panel events, trivia fun, surveys, and a variety of social media tactics.

#FlexYourFirst Panel Event: Through this campus event, students watched a 15-minute documentary on Women and the Vote New York State. At the conclusion of the film, the audience engaged in open conversation with our esteemed panelists, Dr. Kyla Wagner and documentarian Lorraine Werner which focused on First Amendment rights and how these rights were pivotal in both the women’s and civil rights movements. The night ended with a trivia quiz for the chance to win a variety of prizes. To encourage students to continue the conversation, the team gave out \$1 gift certificates to campus coffee shop “Peoples Choice” along with a cookies and a bag that included facts about the First Amendment.



Donuts, Dogs, and Constitutional Rights: To continue the First Amendment conversation following the Flex Your First event, the team planned a collective tabling event, “Donuts, Dogs and Constitutional Rights.” The event aimed to continue the conversation about First Amendment rights, encompassing both capstone campaigns into one event. To share in our treats, and enjoy a little puppy fun, students answered trivia questions taking home prizes for correct answers, enjoyed delicious local “#CUSE1ForAll Sparkler” constitutional themed donuts, and a First Amendment bookmark.

PESO MODEL EVALUATION

PAID

Paid methods were a successful component of our campaign, serving both as incentives and avenues for campaign promotion.

Paid Media:

- The Tab Syracuse Partnership
- Gift Card Prizes for Event
- Gift Bags for Event
- Gifts for Panelists and Coordinators
- People's Place Vouchers

EARNED

Earned methods provided moderate success for the campaign, yet these efforts could have been strengthened.

Earned Media:

- Women in Communications
- Hill Communications
- No success with Daily Orange or CitrusTV

SHARED

Identifying strictly shared methods, these tactics were not executed as initially intended, but still provided some coverage for our campaign.

Shared Media:

- Unable to secure WIC member for panel
- Coordination with WIC Instagram promotion was completed, yet did not yield the best results

OWNED

Owned methods were instrumental in facilitating success with other forms of integrated media, and were key aspects of enhancing our campaign.

Owned Media:

- Reservation of Event Room
- Flex Your First Amendment Rights Cards
- Creation of Kahoot
- Development of Content Calendar
- Use of Canva for Content Creation
- Creation of Logo

PESO MODEL EVALUATION: CONVERGED METHODS

Converged and integrated methods, with the exception of a few elements, were the most successful components that contributed to the Flex your First campaign. All of these aspects maximized the campaign's reach and are responsible for a majority of the impressions garnered.

Owned & Shared

- Moderate Amount of Responses for the Pre-Event Survey
- Successful development of campaign through Cuse 1 for All Instagram account and Newhouse PR Twitter account
- Successful live tweets and stories during Flex Your First event
- Struggled to effectively promote the Flex Your First Giveaway
- Failed to effectively disseminate First Amendment and social movements facts on social media pages

Owned, Shared & Earned

- Successful Distribution of Event Email to PRL Professors
- Relatively High Engagement with Flex Your First Tabling Event

Paid, Earned, Shared & Owned

- Donuts, Dogs, & Constitutional Rights Collective Event

Earned & Shared

- Collaborative and effective creation of Women and the Vote New York State Press Kit

Paid, Owned & Shared

- Creation and adequate distribution of Flex Your First Goodie Bags

Our team's campaign, Flex Your First in conjunction with #Cuse1forAll, achieved success based on the data and information compiled. While some aspects could have been improved, the campaign reached its initial objectives and improved the conversation about the First Amendment on the Syracuse University campus, contributing to the main goal of 1 for All. Data collected from the event and engagement in the social sphere demonstrates that our audience was impacted by the campaign's messaging and has a stronger understanding of the First Amendment and its role in social movements, particularly the women's movement and the Civil Rights movement. At the conclusion of our campaign, our team accomplished both our overall goal and main objectives, enhancing the mission of 1 for All as well as Women and the Vote New York State.