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| pn-logo-on-wte | **2013 ACE Critique and Awards Program** ***NMSU Media Productions — Jeanne Gleason*** |

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| ***Don’t Be Gross*****Class 39:** **Innovative use of** **communication technology** | http://ace.nmsu.edu/2013/DBG/Class17DBGlogo.jpg |
| **To see the actual entry (the above image is only a sample), please visit:** [ace.nmsu.edu/2013/DBG/Class39DBG.html](http://ace.nmsu.edu/2013/DBG/Class39DBG.html) |

Innovations and instructional design:

This marketing campaign was designed for an in-school food safety project, raising awareness among teens about actions they take each day that are unsafe and about positive steps they can take to prevent illness.

The first innovations in this program is that, in addition to the traditional training videos so common in many educational campaign, the *Don’t Be Gross* campaign encourages and empowers participants to help make these funny animated videos “go viral” through their social media networks. Research shows the most powerful way to reach this age group is through peer networks and social norms.

The second innovation is that the marketing campaign was guided by formative focus groups with the teenagers and ultimately included items the teens thought were cool, such as temporary tattoos, non-traditional designs for water bottles, soap case key chains, and wristbands. The teenagers also helped select the slogan *Don’t Be Gross,* stressing that they and their friends were most likely to change behavior if others in their social group felt a specific behavior is simply *Gross!*  They told us social pressure is more powerful than scientific facts.

The third innovation is the intervention’s focus on the humor and grossness of the socially undesired behavior, with limited scientific preaching.

The fourth innovation is the evaluation methods. In addition to traditional summative focus groups and surveys, this project will track the sharing of the animations by monitoring clicks on the school-specific links to the YouTube animations. In addition, the researchers will measure the use of hand soap in the bathrooms before and after the release of the intervention to establish whether behavior actually changed and how long the change lasted.

To see an example of the animated videos on a school webpage, go to <http://www.dontbegross.com/bedminsterTownship.html>

Purpose (goals, objectives, need):

The *Don’t Be Gross* marketing communications campaign is part of a USDA grant project, with all media tools produced by NMSU’s Media Productions and outreach delivered by Rutgers University in New Jersey middle schools. The campaign was based on preliminary research into the role and importance of peer networks and social norms on food safety behaviors of middle school youth. The objective was to use viral marketing for distribution of messages by middle school students through their pre-existing social networks. The project seeks to create social norms within the student body deeming certain behaviors *really gross*, such as sharing water bottles, not washing hands properly or eating food that fell on the floor. By establishing a norm of what is *gross*, visual storytelling may change behavior more efficiently and permanently than other, more traditional forms of education.

Audience:

The pilot schools included 13 middle schools in New Jersey, with formative evaluation conducted both in New Jersey and in NMSU’s Learning Games Lab in New Mexico. Secondary audiences expanded to include the members of the students’ social networks as they posted links and animated videos to their social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, or Google+. YouTube data of hits on these animated videos showed the audience expanded far outside of the school community to viewers across the country.

Marketing/promotion:

*Don’t Be Gross* had a robust marketing and promotional plan through 13 New Jersey schools during the initial research phase. The posters, wristbands, temporary tattoos, water bottles, and soap case key chains were widely posted and distributed throughout the schools on a staggered basis, to allow researchers to analyze the hit data of the animated videos on YouTube based on school release dates, and to measure behavioral change (such as use of soap in school bathrooms).

Role of each entrant for the project:

All media for this campaign, including posters, wristbands, temporary tattoos, soap case key chains and online animated videos, were designed in New Mexico State University’s Media Productions Studios by a team of animators, programmers, and instructional designers and a formative evaluation specialist.

Extent to which project met goals and objectives:

All media tools underwent extensive formative evaluation conducted both in New Jersey and in NMSU’s Learning Games Lab in New Mexico. This formative evaluation found that the campaign media and media channels were ideally suited to meet the project’s goals and objectives. The statistical data and conclusions from the 13 middle school test sites are still being evaluated by Rutgers University and have not yet been published. However, the researchers indicate that the results were positive.

How diversity was incorporated into your entry:

New Mexico has a Hispanic-majority public school student body population and has long been considered a bellwether for future student body characteristics in the United States. The NMSU Media Productions team is steeped in the mindset of incorporating diversity into every project, and during the formative evaluation conducted in NMSU’s Learning Games Lab with middle schoolers, the team ensured that the images, languages and approach used by the marketing campaign tools were accepted by a diverse youth audience.