

## Saving Our Sisters - Spelman College Launches a Wellness Revolution

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Spelman College, Jan 1, 2013

**Summary:** 2013 Silver Anvil Award of Excellence Winner — Integrated Communications — Nonprofit Organizations

When Spelman College decided to end NCAA participation in May 2013, it was not rejecting sports, but instead, tackling a bigger issue – eradicating health disparities among African-American women. Black women suffer and die from diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and cancer at higher rates than women of other ethnicities. Boldly deciding to reallocate athletics funds to a wellness program for all, Spelman employed integrated strategies to gain buy-in and raise funds for a state-of-the-art wellness facility. Considered a model to follow, Spelman's **Wellness Revolution** launch garnered national exposure and secured \$5.6 million of \$18 million needed for the facility.

Integrated communications includes any program that demonstrates leadership of public relations strategies and tactics in a creative and effective integrated campaign, along with other marketing or communications. The program must demonstrate the clear leadership of public relations, along with its integration with other disciplines. The nonprofit subcategory is specifically intended for health and welfare organizations, as well as educational and cultural institutions not included in other subcategories.

### Full Text: **SITUATION ANALYSIS**

Many in the Black community believe that the health status of African-American women is a primary indication of the health of Blacks living in America. If that is the case, the news is not good. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 44% of Black women over the age of 20 have high blood pressure and four out of five are overweight or obese. At Spelman, a historically Black college for women, an analysis of the health forms submitted by the class of 2016 revealed that an alarming number of these students already have hypertension, Type II diabetes, or some other chronic disease. While surprising, this is merely a reflection of the status of Black women's health across the country.

Spelman is known for educating the best and the brightest – women who go on to change the world. However, given the current state of Black women's health, we question whether these students will live long enough to make an impact? Committed to educating the whole person- mind, body and spirit- when restructuring occurred in the Great South Athletics Conference, rather than join a new conference, Spelman decided to reallocate the \$1 million being used to support 80 student athletes to a wellness program for all 2100 students.

Launching a **Wellness Revolution**, an initiative designed to empower and educate Spelman women and the world on the value of lifelong wellness, would require buy-in from students, faculty, staff, alumnae, trustees and donors to not only make the program effective, but to generate funds for a new state-of-art facility. With this initiative, the college faced two specific challenges:

- The decision to end “athletics” raised questions about the impact on organized

competition. Also, given the great stride made for women with Title IX, many questioned whether this would be a step backward for women athletes.

- Built in the 1950's Read Hall Gymnasium only supports 500 students rendering it inadequate to support the Wellness Revolution program. With other buildings also in need of renovations, buy-in from all constituents would be needed to raise funds and put Read Hall at the front of the line.

To address these challenges, an integrated internal/external communications strategy was employed to highlight how Spelman's **Wellness Revolution**, powered by a state-of-the-art facility, will change the health trajectory of the population the college serves.

## RESEARCH

**Primary research** was critical to shaping communication strategies/tactics and identifying the needs and interests of the Spelman community related to the wellness program and the Read Hall renovation. The College conducted the following surveys:

- Sept. 2012 - Office of Student Affairs conducted surveys and focus groups to collect data regarding the frequency and level of participation in current fitness programs.
  - *Participants included:* 324 students, 47 faculty/staff and 10 athletic department faculty/staff:
  - *Key findings* - 71.1% of students, 60% of athletic faculty/staff, and 93% of faculty/staff use fitness programs offered; and 27.1% of students and 29.5% of faculty/staff participate in fitness programs at least two times per week.
- Oct. 2012 - Facilities Management and Services conducted a student forum, "What Does a 21st Century Wellness Center Look Like to You?"
  - 355 students participated:
  - *Key finding* - Top three programming and facility upgrades wanted: addition of cardio and weight training classes and an indoor track.

## PLANNING

For Phase I, Aug. – Dec. 2012, the Office of Communications developed an integrated communications strategy with the overarching goal of creating awareness and buy-in from key constituents. As a result of the research findings, the strategy centered on:

- Raising the institution's profile as a leading advocate for Black women's overall health and wellness.
- Creating awareness and support for the wellness movement across the entire campus.
- Communicating the necessity of having the appropriate facility to create a culture of wellness.
- Generating media coverage to reinforce how Spelman values a healthy lifestyle as a means of developing the whole person.

Designed to support the launch of the **Wellness Revolution** and help yield donations for the Read Hall Project, our overall strategy for Phase I emphasized educating internal/external audiences on Spelman's unique opportunity to take a leadership role in positively impacting the health of Black women. We had three key measurable objectives:

- Actively engage 20K social media users through Facebook and Twitter.
- Increase participation by 25% among campus constituents in wellness programs.
- Garner 100 million media impressions (unique visitors) across key verticals including higher education, medical, African-American and mainstream media outlets.

*Target audiences:* students, parents, faculty, staff, alumnae, trustees, donors, media. *Phase I Communications Budget:* \$5000.

## EXECUTION

Taking a two-pronged approach, Phase I of the campaign was supported by a diverse mix of tactics and media elements. The initiative rolled out with a soft launch in Sept. 2012 with a column by President Beverly Daniel Tatum in *Inside Spelman*, the college's digital publication. The column was followed by the president speaking at the National Black Women's Health Conference and the publishing of series of health related articles in *Inside Spelman*. The campaign officially launched on Nov. 1 and has been supported by a bevy of activities.

- **Internal Communications:** On Nov. 1 a letter from the President went out announcing the official launch of the **Wellness Revolution** to the campus community.
- **Media Relations:** As the result of our pitch, an exclusive feature story was published in Inside Higher Education on Nov. 1, 2012. The president, students and staff have participated in 24 media interviews since the launch, with feature stories in top outlets including the *New York Times*, *Reuters*, the *Associated Press*, Fox News, and NPR.
- **Featured Events:** Two major events targeting both internal and external constituents featuring leading health experts were hosted on campus with capacity crowds in the 1000-seat chapel.
- **Websites:** The college homepage, which averages 250K unique visitors monthly, and a dedicated wellness web page are being utilized to provide up-to-date wellness information.
- **Digital Communications:** The college's weekly e-newsletter was used to update more than 18,000 subscribers on events and news coverage on the wellness revolution. *Inside Spelman*, with an average of 4,940 unique visitors per month, served as the main news portal for detailed health information.
- **Social Media Support:** Spelman College social media vehicles assisted with organic connections with constituents. More than 40 combined posts went out on Facebook and Twitter and two tweet chats were hosted. A YouTube video was also produced to promote peer-to-peer conversations.

## EVALUATION

Employing integrated internal and external communications strategies rendered positive results. Helping to yield \$5.6 million towards an initial goal of \$13 million, Phase I of our campaign was successful as we significantly exceeded all of our stated objectives. Results include:

- Donations and support from constituents and others who read about the **Wellness Revolution**.
- 30K Facebook audience reach, 562 retweets, 1047 likes, 124 shares, 1201 clicks, 94 comments.
- 75% increase in wellness program participants from Spring 2012 to Fall 2012.
- Garnered more than 675 million media impressions (unique visitors) with coverage in **815** media outlets from Nov. 1 – Dec. 31.