



ABIDE Committee
Carroll Hall, CB 3365
Chapel Hill, NC 27599

MEJO 332: Public Relations Writing
APPLES Client Portfolio
ABIDE Committee
Izzy Kempson, Rachel Kivlan, Angel Jin, Jaleah Taylor, Mia Taboada and Alex Johnson

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Communication Audit

Background

The ABIDE Committee, standing for Access, Belonging, Inclusion, Diversity and Equity, works within the UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media to promote and sustain an inclusive culture. Formerly known as the Diversity Committee, the group was renamed ABIDE in 2021 to highlight issues beyond diversity. ABIDE enhances the UNC Hussman School's efforts to achieve its diversity and inclusion goals through hosting events and funding various projects.

The ABIDE Committee is made up of faculty and staff representing a cross-section of perspectives and roles within the school. The committee is one of many programs and initiatives the UNC Hussman School developed to work towards its DEI Plan of Action. The school's vision is to create and sustain a community that upholds progress, inclusivity and equitability. Led by Associate Dean Dr. Trevy McDonald, ABIDE helps implement university initiatives and provides a collective voice on best practices to UNC-Chapel Hill's administrators.

In February 2023, the ABIDE Committee announced the recipients of its 2023 grants, which funded various diverse projects for faculty, students and staff. Associate Professor Chad Heartwood, recipient of the DEI Guest Speaker Fund, used his grant to pay stipends for two women of color to speak in his classes at the UNC Hussman School and during a PhotoNight event open to all students and the general public. Stephanie Willen Brown, director of the Park Library, received the DEI Conference Travel & Personal Development Fund. She used the grant to attend the biennial conference of the Association of College & Research Libraries. Xpressions Fashion Club received the Student Organization DEI Event Fund, which they used to host a photography workshop with Greensboro-based photographer Alexis Brown. This event helped the club further explore the importance of diversity in fashion. Clay Williams, a graduate student, used the Research/Professional/Creative Grant for his research in a project exploring how stereotypes of gay male characters in entertainment media affect gay male viewers.

The ABIDE Committee's methods of communication are still a work in progress, and they are working to expand their reach within the UNC Hussman School. The committee currently sends out a bi-monthly faculty newsletter titled "Inclusive Insights," outlining relevant DEI topics and news for faculty to consider when teaching their classes. Additionally, the committee is working on their website, which is currently not public.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- There is a great foundational start to the mission and vision.
- ABIDE effectively mentions the opportunities and programs the committee offers on the available platforms (UNC Hussman website, "DEI" tab on website).
- Presenting information to the audiences of these platforms allows the funding opportunities to receive proper traction from students, faculty and staff (info about professional educational speakers, DEI-focused courses, and DEI-centered celebrations).
- The general audience is reached through the UNC Hussman website and the "Inclusive Insights." Specification and a continuation to reach these audiences as ABIDE moves forward are needed.
- The visuals incorporated within the articles about ABIDE are an excellent method to showcase the events and activities that ABIDE has opened to the student population (adds a humanitarian perspective on ABIDE and its goals of inclusivity and diversity).
- Incorporating photographs entices the target audience to join in educational possibilities.
- Information about the ABIDE leadership team is valuable (keep content about Trevvv McDonald, Nori Comello, Aurora King, etc.) and aids the audience in understanding to whom to direct their questions or recommendations.
- The use of quotes by these leaders in articles shows their dedication to the ABIDE Committee's vision for the school.
- Continuing to incorporate these aspects in future platforms will engage and inform audiences about the resources ABIDE offers for education development.

Weaknesses

- Underdeveloped online presence: the organization currently has no stand-alone website to display all of its information
- Lack of comprehensive introduction: the absence of an "about" page hinders the organization's ability to showcase its identity and purpose effectively
- Unclear strategic direction: ABIDE lacks a clearly defined mission statement, vision, and figure profile; this impedes the organization's ability to communicate a unified strategy
- Inadequate contact information: essential contact and location information is challenging to find, potentially resulting in missed opportunities for collaboration
- Underutilizing media platforms: the organization does not have an established online presence, nor is it fully capitalizing on various media platforms to disseminate information and engage with its audience
- Inconsistent branding: the organization lacks a consistent and cohesive branding strategy

Opportunities

- ABIDE can create and maintain a social media presence specifically for the committee, i.e., Instagram and Facebook, where upcoming events, news, and opportunities can be shared.
- A dedicated listserv of news and events geared specifically towards students.
- Advise professors and faculty to encourage students to attend speaker events through extra credit and assignment opportunities.

- Create a separate newsletter specific to the committee and shorter than the Inclusive Insights so that important committee information is noticed.
- Host events supplementary to speaker events where students are incentivized to attend through free food, wellness activities, and credit opportunities
- Promote leadership opportunities and committee engagements in Hussman classes; incentivize faculty to encourage involvement.
- Create and maintain a public committee-wide calendar visible to all Hussman students on the Hussman website and in Carroll Hall/Park Library with all important committee dates and information.
- Create a dedicated section on the Hussman website (a separate page users can click on) entirely different from the DEI initiatives site to mitigate confusion.

Threats

- The website is currently unavailable to the public; therefore, getting the mission statement and agenda out to the public is challenging.
- The ABIDE Committee is housed underneath the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion website for the Hussman School of Journalism. It does not establish a mission statement different from the overall DEI mission.
- There needs to be a clear description of what the ABIDE committee does, which could hinder potential grant donors from donating or even knowing this opportunity exists.
- Because the "learn more" link under the ABIDE Committee doesn't link users to a more detailed page of ABIDE, potential recipients of the grants need a way to view when the grant applications would go live or even what the grants are.
- Failure to maintain a consistent engagement with the audience can lead to a rapid loss of interest, particularly in ABIDE's situation, where there is already a menial media presence.
- The ABIDE Committee can be easily overlooked amidst the multitude of programs and organizations within Hussman, especially with the emergence of new clubs.

Recommendations

As previously mentioned, the ABIDE Committee is undoubtedly a work in progress. Although it has been around for a few years, the committee members are still working towards various goals like completing the new Hussman DEI website and gaining the UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media students' interest in the goals of access, belonging, inclusion, diversity and equity. Our team has recommendations to further the ABIDE Committee's success and make the principles more present in Hussman students' and faculty's lives.

To communicate better with students, we strongly recommend an ABIDE-specific newsletter catered to the student population. It should be concise, including upcoming events, funding application opportunities, special speakers, and any other dates relating to the ABIDE principles. The dates of events, speakers, or other ABIDE-related occasions should be relevant to what's happening in the world so students are encouraged to learn and attend said events. Even though there is sometimes an ABIDE section of the official school-wide UNC Hussman School newsletter, there should be one email with all the information sent out at least once a month so students don't have to scroll to find it.

Another recommendation that would be beneficial to the ABIDE Committee would be to better incorporate information on the UNC Hussman School Instagram page. Because the majority of this generation of students uses social media daily, it only makes sense that ABIDE information is accessible on platforms like Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), and even TikTok. This page is updated regularly, and it would be helpful if the highlight feature was utilized and consistently visible on the homepage profile, specifically focused on posts related to DEI or ABIDE.

Implementing these recommendations will raise awareness for the ABIDE Committee among UNC Hussman School students and encourage engagement in the committee's events, activities, grants, and other opportunities. Most importantly, the ABIDE Committee should prioritize communication with Hussman students, increase its social media presence, and publish a public-facing website that can serve as a landing page for anyone interested in learning more about the committee. These elements will give the ABIDE Committee a solid foundation that will allow them to grow and improve their communication methods.