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## COMM SENIORS SYNTHESIZE KNOWLEDGE WITH 'REAL LIFE' TEDX PROJECT

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By Brett Ahlin



This year six students from Northwest University are tackling the major task of putting on a coveted TEDx Talk in the Kirkland community as part of a senior project for communication majors.

Created five years ago by NU Communication Department Chair Kara Heinrichs, PhD., Professional Synthesis fast became a course living up to its stated purpose of developing communication skills that students will put into practice in real-life scenarios.

"This course is designed to create a coherence between what students are learning in the classroom and what they're ready to offer in the community," said Heinrichs, an associate professor who designed the class and has taught it since its inception. "The creative approaches students have taken in this class are nothing short of fantastic. These projects have helped land students jobs after they graduate and it's exciting to see what they accomplish together in these tight-knit teams."

This year one Pro Synth group decided to reach for the opportunity to host a TEDx event. TED is an acronym for Technology, Entertainment, Design and it has attracted millions of followers by bringing experts to stages around the country.

The group's six seniors include Charmie Dondrea, Katelyn Reeves, Tommy Jordan, Brenden Keene and Brett Ahlin, along with official licensee and project overseer Meredith Tillery. The team reached out to Shelly Tolo, co-owner of *Tolo Events*, a well-known and respected event production company, to act as the group's mentor and evaluator for the project.

The universally applicable topic, Tillery said, is "Shift" – an allusion to the lives of those experiencing constant transition. "From cups of coffee to graduation ceremonies, [from] photosynthesis to biodiesel; nothing is truly stagnant," she said. The group wanted to focus on a topic all college seniors are experiencing, but also something applicable to all audiences at the TEDx Talk scheduled April 11<sup>th</sup> in downtown Kirkland.

The process of acquiring a TEDx event license is not easy and it normally takes two months just to complete the application and be reviewed by the organization. TEDx's extensive application process required the team to identify an appropriate venue, marketing plans, possible speakers, and careful description of the theme. Tillery's group initially was denied its request for a license, but finally received approval in a January 29<sup>th</sup> email after many months of waiting.

The next step was to lock down a location for the springtime event. Eventually the group settled on Kirkland Performance Center.

The final step in this grueling process is the group's ongoing search for sponsorships. Jordan and Ahlin are in charge of this phase of the project regularly coached by Heinrichs and Tolo.

The group over the next few weeks will be calling on area businesses, pitching TEDx sponsorship packages in hopes of securing as much funding as possible.

"This TEDx event is one of our last big projects before we leave Northwest, so you should expect nothing but our best efforts," Dondrea said. "We are all so excited to have been approved [and I] couldn't have asked for a better group to be hosting this event with."

