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Congratulations to the IAMFRESNOSTATE video award winners:



1st Place:
Bryan Harley

2nd Place:
Leslie Cooper

3rd Place:
Nick Lopez

Viewers' Choice:
Graham Wahlburg, Marc DiTirro
Ryan Welch and Brandon Leong

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CAMPAIGN SPOTLIGHT

Forget Spartacus, I Am Fresno State

By STUART ELLIOTT

For the last couple of years, **Madison Avenue** has been embracing an idea called user-generated content, encouraging consumers to create advertising, promotional video clips and other marketing messages that were once produced solely by professionals. Among the blue-chip marketers taking part in the trend are Chevrolet, Frito-Lay, Geico, Heinz ketchup, KFC, Mr. Clean, the National Football League and [Verizon Communications](#).

Now, the trend is expanding into realms beyond peddling products. The educational field seems an appropriate next step, given that many of the consumers who are creating user-generated content are the tech-savvy members of Generation Y.

Indeed, a university in California has just concluded a campus competition to create video clips that are meant to appeal to potential applicants as well as stir feelings of pride among students, alumni and members of the faculty and staff. [California State University](#), Fresno, also known as **Fresno State**, called the contest the “**I Am Fresno State Video Project**,” named after a Web site that the school recently put up ([iamfresnostate.com](#)).

The competition also involved Web sites that were already popular with students like **MySpace** and **YouTube**. The video clips that won the contest can be watched on both those sites.

The contest cost **Fresno State** peanuts compared with what a professional advertising agency would have charged for a promotional campaign. The largest expense, \$950, was for cash prizes for the winners. There were additional costs for printing fliers and posters to announce the contest as well as to host an awards party at a campus coffee house and pub, The Bucket.

“We didn’t have criteria for the contest beyond ‘**I Am Fresno State**’ and ‘What does that mean to you?’ ” says Peter Robertson, director for annual giving at Fresno State, who was the coordinator of the project, because “we wanted it to be in the students’ voices.”

“I loved the entries; they were very creative,” Mr. Robertson says, adding that as someone in his early 40s, “I never would have

thought of” the approaches the students took in the video clips they submitted.

“That’s what made it so dynamic and surprising,” Mr. Robertson says.

There were 10 entries in the contest, which were judged on May 9 by a panel composed of Mr. Robertson, two other **Fresno State** administrators and two executives from the **Fresno State Alumni Association**.

The winner was an entry submitted by Bryan Harley, a 22-year-old senior with a major in mass communications and journalism. Mr. Harley, who graduated last week, created a spoof of the current series of commercials for [Apple](#) that compare Macintosh computers and PCs.



In Mr. Harley’s video clip, he plays both characters, “**Fresno State**,” which is part of the California State system of universities, and “a U.C.,” referring to a school that is part of the [University of California](#) system. The two systems compete intensely for students, faculty members, funds and bragging rights; the U.C. schools tend to be larger, cost more to attend and are better known outside California.

In the video clip, Mr. Harley, as a U.C. school, is dressed in a sports coat and speaks formally. He says: “You know, we have a lot of the same programs. But we also have things that make us different.”

As **Fresno State**, Mr. Harley is dressed more casually, in a sweatshirt bearing the **Fresno State** bulldog mascot. “We’re one of the only universities with a commercial winery,” he says, adding, “not to mention we have cheaper tuition prices.”

“There’s just so many things that make us unique, I can’t list them all,” Mr. Harley, as **Fresno State**, concludes. As a U.C., he replies: “Wow. Did I mention I was a U.C.?” He answers, as **Fresno State**, “Yeah.” The concluding music is the same sprightly notes heard at the end of the Apple commercials.

The contest was only the second user-generated content competition that Mr. Harley has entered, he says in an interview.

The other was sponsored “by the band Incubus, asking fans to make the next music video for one of their songs,” he adds. “I made it to the top 12, but I did not win.”

As a student with a specialty in “electronic media production,” Mr. Harley says, “this comes like second nature to me.”

“I think it’s great that these companies are looking for fans or the **YouTube** generation, whatever you want to call it, for new ideas on how to sell products,” he adds. “The technology is so affordable and it’s everywhere and easy.”

The idea for his entry came to him after “thinking about the theme ‘**I Am Fresno State**’ over and over,” Mr. Harley says, “and immediately I thought about those Mac and PC commercials: ‘I’m a Mac.’ ‘I’m a PC.’”

The video clip took him about four and a half hours to produce, he recalls, and it was finished “around 2:30 the morning it was due.”

“Friends told me I was going to win; I thought, ‘Whatever,’” Mr. Harley says, but when he found out that he had actually won the \$350 first prize, “it was exciting.”

The second prize, \$250, went to Nick Lopez, a student who put up 2,000 Post-it Notes on a wall to spell out “**I Am Fresno State**.” The two and a half hours it took to finish the feat are compressed to 25 seconds in his video clip as “The Flight of the Bumblebee” plays on the soundtrack.

The third prize, \$150, was won by Leslie Cooper, whose video clip also compresses time. The four years she spent at **Fresno State** are covered in 25 seconds, from the acceptance letter she received in 2003 as a high school senior to her college textbooks to a final scene in which she dons her cap and gown.

There was also a Viewers’ Choice Award, of \$100, which went to a video clip produced by four friends — three sophomores and a freshman.

The clip is produced with a deliberately cheesy look and has a humorous tone that can best be described as wink-wink, nudge-nudge. As students roam the campus in a seemingly aimless fashion, the soundtrack plays silly music that parodies official school songs.

“After we made it we were joking that if no one liked it, at least we had fun,” says Ryan Welch, one of the three sophomores who created the clip along with Graham Wahlberg and Brandon Leong. (Their freshman friend is Marc DiTirro.)

“And it’s cool to know how easy it is for so many people to see it,” Mr. Welch says.

As of Sunday, the quartet’s video clip had been watched more than 650 times on [www.youtube.com](#). Mr. Harley’s had been watched more than 750 times, Mr. Lopez’s more than 420 times and Ms. Cooper’s more than 400 times. (The people involved in the project are watching the tallies, too. Mr. Robertson concluded his interview by saying, “Since we’ve been talking, Bryan’s video has been watched two more times.”)

Also, the **Fresno State** page on **MySpace** ([myspace.com/iamfresnostate](#)) had more than 2,430 friends listed as of Sunday.

Mr. Wahlberg says his experience with user-generated content had been limited to a previous entry in one other contest.

“The software we have on the Mac makes it easy to edit a movie,” he says. “It makes it seem like anyone can do it.”

In fact, Mr. Wahlberg is a construction management major and Mr. Welch is a history major.

Now that his video clip has won a prize, “I don’t think I would change my major,” Mr. Wahlberg says, but it is “an incentive to keep being on the creative side.”