Orange Umbrella Transitions Students From Classroom to Real World

By: Hope Geissler

For students like Geethika Kataru, finding out how to apply their major to the real world can be difficult, but Orange Umbrella is helping students figure out how to take the skills they learned in class to the professional level.

Geethika Kataru, a senior political science and film major, said she wanted to learn how the film skills she learned could be applied outside of the Hollywood film industry.

"I am from an Indian immigrant family where everyone is doctors and engineers," said Kataru. "When I came into this creative field, I had no idea how to use what I have learned in a practical way." The real-world clients that Orange Umbrella provides have given her that perspective, said Kataru.

Orange Umbrella is a student-run advertising agency that allows members to work with South Florida companies. Kataru applied to Orange Umbrella in the spring of 2022 after seeing her friends post about it on social media.

Last semester Kataru worked for the Audubon Society through Orange Umbrella. She shot B-roll in the Everglades and conducted interviews with scientists and researchers. Kataru got to go out on an airboat and practice her camera skills on the water.

"Being able to go out on the boat was very cool and unlike any of the narrative films I make in class, Kataru said. "My goal for this semester is getting my editing skills up to par so that I can really deliver on that project."

Orange Umbrella was started in August 2016 when Gregory J. Shepherd, School of Communication dean, handed the project to MJ Barnes, managing director of Orange Umbrella. Orange Umbrella was Shepherd's idea and he thought Barnes was the perfect person to make his idea come to life. Orange Umbrella took off within the first three semesters, said Barnes.

Although Orange Umbrella is run through the School of Communication, the organization is open to all UM students. Orange Umbrella contains an HR department, a finance department and a sales department. Students do not get paid for their work with Orange Umbrella.

"You can get something out of it across all areas of business if you are looking to go into that world after school," Barnes said.

Barnes wants to create an environment where students can build real relationships instead of just needing things from one another.

"Culture is very important to us. I've learned very early in my career that if you love where you work then work doesn't feel like work," Barnes said. "We really do make it a priority to make

sure people feel welcome, that they feel valued and that they are challenged, but are also met with support."

Aside from the advertising work students do, Orange Umbrella also teaches students how a company works.

"When I got to my internships over the summer, I wasn't nervous speaking to other people because Orange Umbrella taught me how an agency works from top to bottom," said senior Rachel Fein, director of social media for Orange Umbrella and a media management major. Fein joined Orange Umbrella in January 2019.

Orange Umbrella started working with Bicycle Action Committee in 2021. Bicycle Action Committee was created in 2008 with the goal of making Miami a more bike friendly city. Orange Umbrella provided the company with its online branding.

"They're great," said Richard Cahlin, CEO and founder of Bicycle Action Committee. "I'm very fond of the group. They did a wonderful job over Zoom, and meeting with them in person was even better."

Cahlin said he plans on doing more work with Orange Umbrella this year.

Students can get involved with Orange Umbrella by applying to the organization. Once accepted, students can enroll in COM 302, which is the class when Orange Umbrella meets. The class can accommodate around 75 to 100 students. Orange Umbrella can range from one to three credits for students.