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ISIS REIMAGINED Using ISIS Recruitment Techniques in a Peaceful Student Organization

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ISIS REIMAGINED
Using ISIS Recruitment Techniques in a Peaceful Student Organization

University Honors Program Thesis/Capstone/Creative Project

University of Nebraska at Omaha

Submitted by

Amanda Greer, December 2017

Dr. Gina Ligon, Advisor
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December 11, 2017

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA
HONORS THESIS/PROJECT/CREATIVE ACTIVITY ABSTRACT

PROGRAM: UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM
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UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA
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TELEPHONE: (402) 554-2696
UNIVERSITY: YES
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PROGRAM SIZE: 450+
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS:

The Islamic State in al-Sham (ISIS) is one of the most successful recruiting terrorist organization in history. They target people who feel like outsiders and loners. Such groups of people include second generation immigrants and refugees. A student organization was created to help these populations feel included in the community and to spread awareness about the problem. A previous national campaign proved the idea effective now the question comes about how to make it a sustainable long-run buffer to ISIS recruitment. I propose the creation of a peaceful student organization based on the adaptation of ISIS recruitment techniques. The organizational life cycle of ISIS will be researched and compared to that of the Refugee Perspective, a student organization. The structures, problems, and a comparison of solutions to the problems will be discussed. Finally, the analysis of how the difference in the demographic, structure, and purpose will be analyzed. Possible solutions to the problems presented will be offered and advice to the next leader of the Refugee Perspective will be given. Utilizing ISIS techniques is an effective method for students to buffer ISIS recruitment.

Keywords: ISIS, Recruitment techniques, Student Organization, sustainable.
Introduction

ISIS is one of the most successful terrorist recruiting organizations in history. The University of Nebraska- Omaha’s student organization, The Refugee Perspective, has not only researched their techniques but has used them as a deterrence against ISIS recruitment. “ISIS Reimagined” is more than just a catchy title. It is an idea that was actually implemented by university students. The idea and the organization both came from the idea of two questions. What if a peaceful student organization could harness the recruitment power and the retention rate of ISIS? What if the organization could use ISIS’s own strategies as a deterrence against their recruitment abilities?

For my thesis, I am going to use my UNO student organization, The Refugee Perspective, to create a campaign that would become a sustainable and long-run buffer to ISIS recruitment. This would be a student organization that would stand the test of time and would be continued on in future generations. It would be an organization that would utilize ISIS techniques to create campaigns that are aimed at populations that feel like outcasts or feel isolated. The main focus will be for UNO students and the surrounding community. The campaigns would make these populations feel included and welcomed in their community and would educate others that these people are no different than them. The students involved in the Refugee Perspective are members who were involved with the original Refugee Perspective campaign. A campaign that was created in regards to a national competition. We wanted to learn from ISIS and take some of their lessons and the lessons we learned during our campaign to apply to a peaceful student organization.
ISIS BACKGROUND

Organizations are born, they grow, and they decline. ISIS is no exception to this life cycle. In this thesis, I am going to compare the life cycle of ISIS from an organizational standpoint to the life cycle of the Refugee Perspective. To cover ISIS’s entire background would take an extraordinary amount of time and require a very detailed timeline. For my thesis, I will focus on the main points in their history as it relates to the project at hand.

ISIS started off as a part of the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization that began in 2004. A man named, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi established the organization and titled it, al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).\textsuperscript{1} Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was trying to create a war targeting the Shia Muslim community. On June 7\textsuperscript{th}, 2006, Musab al-Zarqawi is killed in a US air strike.\textsuperscript{2} Shortly after, another leader arose to take his place and lead the terrorist organization. This leader was Abu Ayyub al-Masri.

Ayyub al-Masri worked quickly and by October of the same year he had announced the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq or ISI for short. Ayyub al-Masri then placed Abu Omar al-Baghdadi as the new leader\textsuperscript{3} (see figure 1).\textsuperscript{4} Not too long after Ayyub al-Masri was

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.jpg}
\caption{Abu Bakr-al-Baghdadi}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{3} See 1
also killed and the replacement for the head of the Al-Qaeda group was, Ayman al-Zawahiri. As ISI grew it obtained more power and started to branch off from the main Al-Qaeda organization. ISI was expanding into Syria despite al-Zawahiri telling al-Baghdadi to return to Iraq. Abu al-Baghdadi was quoted stating, “I have to choose between the rule of God and the rule of Zawahiri, and I choose the rule of God”.

This statement was a clear mark of defiance and would start the cracks in the relationship of the overall organization.

In April of 2013, the faction completely broke from Al-Qaeda when Abu Omar al-Baghdadi declared the absorption of an al Qaeda-backed militant group in Syria known as Jabhat al-Nusra, or more commonly referred to as the al-Nusra Front. This was a unilateral move by al-Baghdadi and was rejected by al-Nusra. A bloody power struggle between the two groups would then begin over territory in Syria. With Omar al-Baghdadi declaring the al-Nusra Front as part of the ISI it sparked a terrorist on terrorist war. Recruitment would become their most powerful tool. A tool they would become famous for using and a skill that they have polished to almost perfection like no terrorist organization before them. As ISI grew the tactics it utilized became more ruthless and brutal. Decapitations, massacres of prisoners, persecution of religious minorities, and other forms of atrocities set the group apart from its parent organization. ISIS became known for their recorded and publicized beheadings of prisoners. One of the most famous images

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produced and associated with ISIS is that of the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians on a beach (See figure 2).  

Al-Qaeda was then quick to publicly disown the group. On February 3rd, 2014, Al-Qaeda general command declared on multiple jihadist websites that ISI is no longer an affiliate of the organization.  

Abu al-Baghadi renames the ISI to include the newly gained territory. He names the organization the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS). Throughout 2014, ISIS quickly spreading overtaking numerous cities all over Syria. The next major step for the terrorist organization was to create their own country and have the legitimacy that comes with it. This is exactly what they planned to do. On June 29th, 2014, ISIS declared the creation of an Islamic State that would erase all state borders and allow for the control of the world’s 1.5 billion Muslims. ISIS wanted 1.5 billion Muslims to live and breathe its ideology. It wanted its

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ideology to be a way of life and to control the lives of all the Muslims in the world. The group also announced another name change, declaring itself the Islamic State (IS) to reflect its new status. Since that time IS has gained more territory and has recruited numerous individuals from around the world. IS is now on the decline stage of the organizational life cycle. Its recruitment has slowed down considerably to its 2014-2015 numbers and on October 17th, 2017 Syrian troops force the terrorist organization out of the city of Albu Kamal, their last major stronghold in the country.11

The Importance

As stated earlier, ISIS is the most successful recruiting terrorist organization in history. What makes them unique is their ability to encompass all different kinds of people with different origins, backgrounds, and views. They recruit people from all around the world to come and join their organization. They make these people believe in their ideas so strongly that the people then live and die for those beliefs. Their recruitment skills are beyond anything we have seen before in a terrorist organization and has made it hard to curb their recruitment. In fact, majority of the Muslims

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most likely to join ISIS are not even from the Middle East (See Figure 3). The highest percentages are in Western developed countries. The countries that have highly developed economies, highly developed political and legal systems, and generally low income inequalities (See Figure 4). This originally puzzled researchers as it was thought that poor economic conditions should be the main driver of joining this kind of organization. Researchers from the National Bureau of Economic Research have found that, “the more homogeneous the host country is, the more difficulties Muslim immigrants experience in their process of assimilation. This social isolation seems to induce radicalization, increasing the supply of potential recruits” (Picker). The Muslims in these homogenous regions feel culturally isolated from their counterparts because of the lack of

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13 See 12
14 See 12
diversity in languages, cultures, and even religions (See Figure 5).\(^\text{15}\) ISIS is a terrorist organization that preys upon the groups of people who feel like outsiders in their own community. The kind of people who are loners, isolated, or the non-committed population.

Groups that are vulnerable and have this same theme are refugees and second generation immigrants. These groups often times have trouble integrating into their communities and have the feeling of being left out and isolated. It is also seen that the second generation of refugees

and immigrants have the most prominent feeling of being an outsider and are more vulnerable to extremist recruitment. This is because groups such as ISIS offer them a sense of belonging to a community and a family. They spread propaganda to make themselves seem like allies to these populations. They have even put up aid stations for refugees (See Figure 6).\textsuperscript{16} Note that in Figure six, the picture is of children holding ISIS signs and that each of the aid packages has an ISIS banner on it. ISIS sets up these stations to portray themselves as aid givers and then uses the images to further spread its propaganda for recruitment. The image of the kids points to a friendly, inviting, and family like situation that is appealing to people who feel like outsiders in their own communities.

That being said, I would like to point out that in countries such as America, being a victim of a terrorist attack from an immigrant or a refugee is very rare. In a study done by Alex Nowrasteh, a researcher for the Cato Institute, he found that “the chance of an American being murdered in a terrorist attack caused by a refugee is 1 in 3.64 \textit{billion} per year while the chance of being murdered in an attack committed by an illegal immigrant is an astronomical 1 in

10.9 billion per year”. It is not that these groups of people that are more responsible for terrorist attacks than any other but that they are more vulnerable to the tantalizing ideas of belonging that ISIS portrays to them. The study of ISIS recruitment and the vulnerability of these populations is important because of the numerous refugee crisis's happening around the world including: Syria, the Congo, Venezuela, etc. Even though ISIS is on the decline, these refugee crises can lead to a whole new second generation of refugees and immigrants who feel isolated and are vulnerable to these types of extremist recruitment techniques. This can also lead to an increase in ISIS recruitment in the future and a possible come back for the terrorist organization.

**The Refugee Perspective Background**

The Refugee Perspective is a University of Nebraska at Omaha student organization. Its origins date back to the fall of 2016. This is where a group of honors students, including myself, were brought together in an honors colloquium titled, Domestic Hate Groups and Terrorism (See Figure 7). The course was taught by Professor Dr. Gina Ligon. In this colloquium, the students participated in a national Peer to Peer competition that was hosted by the Department of Homeland Security. The competition was called: P2P: Challenging Extremism, and it was challenging students across the nation to create an anti-extremist campaign. The students in the class were awarded $2,000 as funding to create a unique but replicable campaign that promoted anti-extremism.

It took several days of brainstorming to decide what our project was going to be over and who our target audience was going to be. As we were following the news throughout the first

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couple weeks we noticed that the topic of refugees was a popular subject. We also noticed that there were misconceptions about this group of people, mainly one being that they are terrorists or that terrorists disguise themselves as refugees in order to enter countries and carry out attacks. We felt that since the Syrian refugee crisis was a major issue happening at the time that was surrounded in misconceptions, this was the problem we wanted to try and solve. We wanted to clear up the misconceptions about refugees and spread awareness of the problems they face in our own country and awareness that they were people just like the rest of us. This idea inspired our name, The Refugee Perspective.

Next we had to find our target audience. Since we were all college students and had the University in common we decided that we were going to orient our campaign to specifically target college students from rural Nebraska. Nebraska is state that lacks diversity in a majority of its
areas with the exception of major cities such as Lincoln and Omaha. After researching the demographics of our own university we found that there was an indication of low exposure to refugees (See Figure 8).\(^{18}\) The majority of the UNO population at 69.8% was White with the next leading category being Native American at 9.7%. The lack of diversity can lead to feelings of fear and anger towards what is unknown. While researching our target audience we came across a book called, *The American Swastika*, by Pete Simi, a famous researcher. In the book it identified a potential vulnerability that our target audience may have faced is exposure to xenophobic ideologies from childhood.\(^{19}\)

Therefore, we believed that the college students from this area could be susceptible to white supremacist and extremist ideologies because of little exposure to international populations, as well as exposure to potential familial influences regarding xenophobic ideologies. To test out our theory we applied experimental design by giving our target audience a battery of attitudinal measures to assess their internal cognitive susceptibility to extremist campaigns. Our sample indicated almost half of our target audience had negative opinions about refugees. One of the target audience members stated, “*Refugees are dangerous because they could be affiliated with bad organizations in the country they came from.*” When asked if they knew any refugees they stated no despite a refugee was actually one of their fellow student members. This is a common trail of thought and fault among the Midwest because of its lack of diversification and lack of interaction with these groups. An interesting fact we found was that Nebraska has had a recent influx in refugees from all over the world since the 2000’s (See Figure

\(^{18}\) http://collegefactual.com
We found that the largest refugee populations in Nebraska statewide are: Myanmar, Bhutan, and Sudan (See Figure 10).

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21 See 20.
We had a biased population in much of Nebraska’s State Leadership. Our own Governor, Pete Ricketts refused Syrian Refugees in Nebraska. The next step for our project was to decide how we were going to model our campaign and implement it.

In order to figure out the most effective way to create an anti-extremist campaign we needed to research how and why extremist campaigns were so effective in the first place. We found through our research that not only was ISIS the most prevalent extremist group in the media at the time, it was also the most successful recruiting terrorist organization in history. This led to the desire to research them and see which of their methods we could utilize to create a deterrence to their recruitment. We analyzed works on extremist groups such as the, American Swastika, by Pete Simi, and the, Psychology of Terrorism, by J. Hogan. During this time we learned about weak and strong ties and how terrorist organizations utilize them to be successful recruiters. We then decided that we were going to structure ourselves like ISIS and to use their methods of recruitment as a source of influence for our own campaign. With this it was decided that we were going to take a three-prong approach to the campaign. The campaign was going to consist of a dinner, a video, and ads crafted to show a sense of belonging and then shared on multiple social media platforms in the same manner that ISIS does.

**Comparison of ISIS and the Refugee Perspective Techniques**

The research on ISIS techniques showed that they relied heavily upon weak and strong ties. Weak ties are the ties formed between people during initial meetings at things in public forums, events, private messaging, etc. They are informal ties between strangers. Strong ties are those that are formed from followed up exposure and continued contact with the person. They
are formed through inclusion in group activities such as dinners, invitations to events, and other activities that bring a feeling of inclusion and belonging. The campaign relied heavily on both ties as depicted in Figure 11.

During our research, we noticed that the most effective method of grabbing an audience’s attention and retaining it was through showing activities that depict familial ties (See Figure 8). Familial ties are ones that show a sense of belonging through family activities such as cooking and eating together. Both organizations utilized the same method of familial ties. ISIS shares images of swimming activities and the Refugee Perspective shared images of family dinners with diverse populations (See Figure 12).²²

The reason why the dinner was so important to the Refugee Perspective was because it started with an interview with a refugee and a weak tie was formed. Then as the relationship grew into a strong tie, we asked her to see if her family would have a dinner with us. Her strong tie to her family brought the family and members from the student organization together. The

dinner with the family help students form bonds with the family members. A few of the family members invited some students, such as myself, to go to concert with their friends. This started the process of forming a strong bond with the other family members. After the event students and the family members started inviting each other to other events, where we met with their friends, family, and others in the community and formed ties with them as well. This is a classic example of exactly what ISIS does. The conversation with the family also helped motivate us.

One of the most memorable parts of the dinner for me was a talk I had with the mother of the family. She was studying to learn English and had just passed her citizenship test. The part that personally motivated me the most was when she talked about her community. Despite living in that community with her family for a couple of years, her neighbors still did not talk to her. They did not wave and they weren’t neighborly. This was behavior the family was used to everywhere they went. They were isolated within their own community and only had their family to rely on. This really struck home with me and was a real-life example of the kind of environment in which we were trying to change. It was an environment that is normally susceptible to ISIS recruitment because of the sense of isolation.
In addition to posting pictures of familial events to recruit new members and spread awareness of our organization, we also crafted ads. We interviewed refugees and took pictures with them doing everyday things and images of them being included into a community (See Figure 13). Some of these pictures included picnics, soccer, school, and playing with leaves. We tried to create a sense of belonging and welcoming to refugees the same way ISIS does. We also tried to create a perspective of refugees being the same as everyone else and showing others that this was their community as well. Everything we did was then cumulated into a documentary that was shared on all the social media platforms to create a vial reach much like what ISIS does with their videos.

Each comment on the video represented a weak tie that we could eventually accumulate into a strong one and have our organization grow and expand. It also offered up a method of recruiting by doing so.

The last prong of the approach was having news outlets spread our campaign material to a greater audience. We were featured in the Business Insider, a
National newspaper, The Omaha World Herald, along with the University newspaper, and the Honors weekly newsletters featured our work. This allowed for a spread of awareness about the project and pointed readers to the social media platforms where our work was being continually posted as well. People would leave comments on all our posts as well starting the cycle of the weak and strong ties that were formed. This is another method of recruitment that we had adapted from ISIS.

The Next Step

The campaign was a success and because of its achieved success we were finalists in the National competition. A majority of the students flew to Washington D.C. where we presented our campaign to Department of the Defense members and other judges. Our campaign place fourth overall but what made this event so important was the bonding that came with it. While in Washington D.C. all the students bonded even more than they had while working on the project (See Figure 14). We did activities together such as touring, shopping, and hanging out. While there we

24 Royer, Xavier. “UNO Honors Students Battle Extremism through a New Perspective.” University of Nebraska Omaha, 1 Dec. 2015.
also seen that ordinary students like us, could have a meaningful impact on the world arounds and change the society we live in. We saw our campaign change people’s views and saw the impact it had on the members who participated, both the students and the refugees. This led to a desire to continue with our work and turn it into something more sustainable and long-term.

After Washington D.C. I decided that the campaign should be turned into a sustainable student organization. This would help procure its position in the University and allow for students to continue with the original work. In order to facilitate the creation of the organization I decided to take another class with Dr. Gina Ligon called, Applied Leadership in the Spring of 2017. In this class I met with another student who was willing to help craft the organization. Together we founded the student organization to continue the work of the original campaign.

We had researched and learned about business models and how effective leadership is managed. During the class, we learned how to communicate with different forms of people using the dimensional model of behavior that separates people into different kinds of categories. We learned how to motivate each group and how to be a leader among them. As leaders crafted an organization constitution and drafted rules. We created mission, vision, and value statements that reflect the overall nature of the organization in the same manner a business would. We made sure that these items were on top of every document the organization produced.

The mission of our organization and its members was the same as in the campaign and was to promote open-mindedness and build understanding among UNO students and the surrounding community about refugees. Our vision for our organization was an Omaha that stands together. We decided this based off of some political statements that had been made by people who hold positions of power that had made it seem like refugees are different and separate from the rest of
the community. Our vision is, therefore, one Omaha that stands together, united. This means that no one is separated or singled out but instead everyone looks out for each other.

Our values were: connection, inclusion, respect, compassion, leadership, and education. These were the main themes that our organization was to operate upon. The initials put together form the word: C.I.R.C.L.E because they should be never-ending and a constant in all of our actions. We tried to structure ourselves like a business but operate like ISIS. We had a president and a vice president. Each position was to be elected every year with the exception of the beginning year because of it being founded in another class. There were then seven subcommittees that each have their own “president” or chair. The committees are: Campus & Community outreach, Research, Website Maintenance, Activity Events & Planning, Marketing and Advertising, Social Media, and Financing and Budgeting. This was the business structure with popular elected positions for the chairs in the subcommittees.

How these committees were supposed to operate were similar to ISIS councils. The committees had the freedom to take their roles and run with them as long as they did not break the organizational expectations as outlined in the mission, moral, and value statements. We wanted to give the members enough room to be able to do what they needed to do and to further the expansion and recruitment of the organization. We had set meetings required of all members to check in on what they were accomplishing. They also had to report to the President and the Vice President every month with updates on what they were doing and if they were planning events then they had to get approval from both the President and Vice President. Everyone had to also operate within the Universities rules and use the university organizations website, Mavsync,
to plan and record meetings and events. It was also used for almost all communication (See Figure 15).

By the end of the semester the organization was facing many difficulties. There were factions that were arising within it. Animosity among members and leadership was present. There was also an overall loss of perspective and a loss in the feeling of being a group.

My Efforts

Throughout the duration of the organization I have tried to plan events and meetings with the members. The first event was a kick-off event for the organization. It was a quick member meeting before everyone attended a Forum on refugees, together. The lecture was to be given by Dr. Junaid Rana and sponsored by The University of Nebraska at Omaha’s own Sustained Dialogue organization. Notice of the event was given couple days prior to the event with a
follow-up notice the day before, in a similar fashion as ISIS. It was listed as an optional meeting with the sole purpose of meeting new recruits and recruiting new members. The notice was sent through several forms of communication including: Mavsync, email, person to person, and a Groupme chat (See Figure 16).

For the meeting, I set up a station for sign-in in front of the Milo Bail Café and had information about the organization laid out on a table. This gained the attention of fellow students who came over to ask about what was going on. From this event alone, the Refugee Perspective recruited five new members. Only four of the regular members attended the meeting.

The planning attempts of other meetings and events ended in failure. There were two events planned to rehome refugees and help them settle in Omaha but poor communication from the families’ organizer led to no students being able to participate in either event.

Ongoing communications were had with Lutheran Family Services (LFS) in order to partner with them and host another refugee dinner. The initial meeting we had with LFS occurred in early October. During this meeting, we discussed the potential for partnership and the visions and goals of our organization. The vision that the Refugee Perspective had for its continued works and for the refugee hosted dinner were vastly different than that of LFS. The Refugee
Perspective wanted to continue to have the campaign and the dinners centered around students and focused on the student population as well as the surrounding community. Lutheran Family Services wanted the dinner to be expanded to include politicians and their views for the organization was more publicly focused and not centered around the students or student participation. There was also difficulty with scheduling another meeting because of the celebration of LFS’s anniversary at the end of October.

In November, I contacted LFS about the potential for a Thanksgiving dinner that another member of the organization wanted to host for refugees. It would be slight difference from what we had done in the past but would have had the same end goal. Instead of having refugees host the dinner, students would host one for them. This would allow for the students and the refugees to form those strong ties and would help the refugees feel included in the community. There was short notice from our organization in wanting to host the dinner, we only informed LFS a week beforehand. There was also short notice from LFS as to whether they would help find a refugee family that would be willing to participate, only two days before the event was to happen. The member of our organization that was supposed to host the dinner also fell ill and a replacement host could not be found among the busy lives of honors students, especially around a holiday time such as Thanksgiving.

During the work, I did on the organization during the Fall 2017 semester, I noticed that there were many problems occurring. Members were not as committed as they once were, communications were strained or difficult to navigate, and there was much turmoil in the organization. The organization was not growing or expanding but seemed to be fracturing and on the decline. Something needed to be done, but before action could be taken the problem needed to be identified.
A Comparison of Structures

To understand what was happening, the comparison of structures between ISIS and the Refugee Perspective organizations had to be done. The differences were vast. ISIS is an organization that relies on radicalizing its people. The people are radicalized to the point that they are willing to live, kill, and die for the organization’s beliefs. Their member’s lives are wholly dedicated to the organization and it is put before anything else in their lives. All the members are brought together by one over-arching and unifying idea. ISIS also has an organic structure to their organization that allows for the flexibility to change in accordance to the evolution of their beliefs. Their positions are not rigid and allow for members to be able operate almost freely as long as they follow organizational expectations. ISIS also operates by its own laws and are not bound by any other body of laws but the ones it creates. Even the laws it creates can be changed for the benefit of the organization. They also manage by fear with harsh punishment for breaking organizational expectations such as death.

The Refugee Perspective, on the other hand is an organization that was founded by a group of honors students. We had a very different demographic than that of ISIS. Our goal was not to radicalize our population as ISIS does. We wanted our members, university students, committed to the organization and to feel a strong attachment to it but not to radicalize them. The majority of members are all honor students. This meant that each member was a highly-involved individual with multiple extra-curricular activities and class requirements to attend to. They all had busy lives that could not be dedicated to the organization a hundred percent of the time. Therefore, the scheduling and enactment of events had to fit within everyone’s schedules or at least the majority of members’ schedules. In addition, the Refugee Perspective had a rigid
business structure that was not flexible. Myself and the Vice President had spent so much time creating the organization and organizing it into a neat and replicated business model. Since we had learned and researched about effective organizational structures we tried to operate within constraints of the model we created. In addition to our own rules drafted, our members had to operate by University rules and abide by the standard process of doing things. This included the use of university websites such as Mavsync to coordinate all student organization events. The leaders in our organization did not manage by fear but rather by an easy-going mentality with no real punishment being available or wanted.

Problems

Since the Refugee Perspective is a student organization, it faced many different problems than that of which ISIS faces. The solutions to the problems are also vastly different. Students schedules never seemed to match up and so events could not be planned or member turn-out was very low. Figure17, is the results from a poll to try and find a universal meeting time throughout the semester. As you can see, there were not many times that matched everyone’s schedules and even when a meeting was set the likelihood of all the members who voted for that time, showing up were very low. This was due to the very busy lives of all

![Figure 17: Poll Of Availability](image)
the student members, and because the members were busy with other priorities in their lives, the overall goal of the organization took a backseat to their individual priorities. There was also no longer an outside pressure to get things done. While in a class the students were all from Honors and so cared deeply about their grades. They would put in all their effort to get an A+. After the class was over, there was still the pressure of the competition in D.C. We wanted to win and our natural competitiveness was another drive to make the campaign succeed. After everything calmed down, there was no longer the outside motivator or pressure to get things done. The organization fell into a lull of easy-going, no worry philosophy. Things would get done if there was a need but right now there was no urgent need, no competition, no grade to be achieved and no hard deadlines for anything. This created a separation among students because there was no longer a unifying idea that held them together. There were no events that strengthened the strong ties between the students. The overall goal of the organization was lost and there was no activity to rekindle that bond and reignite the spark that the goal had once had.

There was also the issue of communication that seemed to be never-ending. Not all students operated within the same communication methods. Some preferred email, some operated solely on Mavsync, some used Groupme, and others only responded in person. Using one form of communication was impossible but even using multiple forms was still a hit or miss activity. This caused information to the members to be delayed or not received at all. There was also the issue of members not responding or answering questions regarding the organization despite receiving all the messages.

The corporate structure that the organization took on also caused a lot of problems. The organization is ideologically based and so a corporate structure restricts the freedom of the organization to evolve as the ideas of the group evolves. The leaders had spent so much time
crafting the positions in the organization that they were stuck to it. They tried to operate solely within their set confines. Which brings up another problem. The positions and responsibilities of the leaders in each committee were vague and caused problems. The original idea was to leave the definitions and responsibilities vague enough so that the members within the committees were free to operate how they wanted in order to get things done. This caused some people to be too afraid to speak up or offer ideas or plan events because it wasn’t listed as one of their responsibilities or they didn’t think it was their place. It also caused a problem for other members who believed that because they held a title they were the only ones responsible for that job. That they couldn’t get help from people in other positions. This put too much stress upon the shoulders of the students and many dropped from their leadership positions in the same week that our kick-off event was supposed to happen.

The structure of the organization restricted the movements of the members and caused many issues. The focus of the organization was shifted to trying to figure out how to operate within the model we constructed and this took up all of our time and focus. It led to the overall goal being lost and members forgetting why we had started what we did in the first place. I would like to take a moment and point out the fact that problems are easy to identify but hard to fix. For the resolution of many of these problems I proposed creating a handbook for the next person in line that detailed what worked and what did not.

A Handbook for The Next in Line

The Refugee Perspective was a proud student organization that was based off a successful student campaign. It embodies the views and feelings of the members who created it and who are a part of it. Although the organization faces many problems, I believe that much of
them can be resolved with a little guidance and that there is still hope for the revival of the Refugee Perspective. This handbook was brainstormed and discussed between myself, the faculty advisor, and fellow student members. It represents all of our views as to what we thought were the problems we faced and how we might fix them.

One of the most important pieces of advice that needs to be passed on to the next leader of the organization is that communication is the key to success. Proper and efficient communication will solve most of the issues that the organization faces. I propose a multi-tiered form of communication that relies on emails and a form of group chat such as Groupme. Email will allow individuals to quickly search for any information that was passed on and can their calendars can be synced via email means. Group chats such as Groupme allow for an almost instantaneous spread of information and gathering of opinions. It allows for all members to freely participate and voice their own opinions. This also makes decisions and consensus easier and quicker to come to.

In order to re-spark the initial fire that the organization had, I believe that first a bonding event must occur, similar to the event we had in Washington D.C.. Students need to meet each other and interact. They need to grow bonds with each other before they are charged with tasks that make them have to rely on one other. It is easier to communicate and to rely on a person who you have a strong tie to. This will also release much of the tension that has accrued overtime and will give the students fond memories to look back upon. The event will also serve the purpose as being a motivator for students to continue working together in a peaceful manner so that more events can be had. After this initial event, I believe an event that involves the interaction with a refugee is needed. This will help students remember why we started what we did and the impact that it had not only on the members but on their community. Interacting with
refugees will make people believe in our ideas again. The event will bring back the unifying idea
and goal that was lost. This will also help students remember why it is important to speak up
about these groups and include them into our community. It will also help fuel the passion for
the organization overall.

The next solution to the problems that the Refugee Perspective faced was that its
structure needs to be reorganized. A business structure is too restricting upon an ideological
group. The structure needs to be flexible to allow for the growth and evolution of the
organizations ideas and goals. The structure must be broken back down into the organic structure
it had started with. That means students sharing with other students, information and events
without having to go through a protocol or procedure. It means that all members need to be
actively involved and feel that they have a voice. I don’t believe that an overall president is
needed but much like the structure of ISIS, a council of students is needed. That way not just one
person is controlling or responsible for overseeing the organization. It also allows for the
dispersal of hostility and resentment that people may have to being controlled by an individual.
With a council of members, there will be the ability for everyone to sit at the table and discuss
their views.

Conclusion

The Refugee Perspective was a student organization that I founded based off a previous
national campaign I had worked on. During the duration of my thesis, I have used ISIS
techniques and applied them to a peaceful student organization in order to create a sustainable
long–run buffer to ISIS recruitment. This student organization has meant so much to a lot of the
people who worked on the original campaign and to its members. The topic of refugees and
terrorism is a topic that will always be relevant. A glance around the world will reveal that
numerous refugee crises are happening right now. This is why students, like myself, care and through our organization, this is how we can help. The Refugee Perspective has taught students that they can make a difference and that they can change the world around them. My hope for the future is that the next person in line will learn from our mistakes and use the handbook to continue with our work. It was a successful campaign and we know it works. With the handbook in hand the next leader of the Refugee Perspective will be able to fix the problems we faced and will achieve our dream of creating a sustainable long-run buffer to ISIS recruitment.