

The University of South Carolina  
School of Journalism and Mass Communications  
The Carolina Agency

# #RideWithPride

An integrated public relations campaign to promote the University of South Carolina Specialty License Plate Opportunity in the Commonwealth of Virginia



School of Journalism and Mass Communications  
**The Carolina Agency**  
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## A note from The Carolina Agency:

In 100 Words or Less...

Over the past decade, many different volunteer student and alumni groups from the University of South Carolina attempted to solicit support for a Fighting Gamecock license plate in the state of Virginia. Despite nine years of effort, no group successfully generated the 350 required applicants. In 2014, a small team from U of SC's student-run firm, The Carolina Agency, led a strong coalition of university staff in a nine-month, PR campaign and delivered 391 approved applications to the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, making their goal a reality.



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## Executive Summary

Florida, Auburn, East Carolina, Florida State and Clemson—what do these schools have in common? All are well-known institutions of higher education, all are located in the southeast, all have dedicated sports fans and all have collegiate license plates available in the commonwealth of Virginia. Students, alumni and fans of these schools have the opportunity to show off their pride and loyalty as they navigate the roads of Virginia. After several visits to the Old Dominion state, U of SC's president noticed large numbers of collegiate plates on road, and wondered why his institution was not represented. Activating The Carolina Agency for this challenge, the team planned and executed an integrated marketing and communications campaign that exceeded all expectations. In nine months, The Carolina Agency and the #RideWithPride campaign achieved what various student and alumni groups could not in the previous nine years.

## Situation Analysis

**Problem:** The Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) currently offers 92 different collegiate license plates for their residents. These specialty plates include a handful of SEC schools and U of SC storied rival Clemson University. Prior to the #RideWithPride campaign, the U of SC was not included in this group. This disparity is significant because more than 1,000 Virginia residents are currently enrolled at U of SC and more than 7,500 U of SC alumni reside in Virginia. The U of SC license plate shortfall was largely due to the daunting challenge of soliciting and collecting 350 or more completed applications and associated fees and providing them en masse to the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles.

**Solution:** For almost a decade, different groups tried unsuccessfully to accomplish this task, primarily targeting U of SC alumni. #RideWithPride adopted a modified approach and expanded the target audience to include the more than 1,000 U of SC students and families who are Virginia residents as well as the loyal U of SC alumni. The success of this approach exceeded expectations in the number of overall applications and in the short time needed to deliver results.

## Research

- **7,500 U of SC alumni** reside in Virginia as of June 2014. (MyCarolina Alumni Association)
- **75 percent of Virginia alumni** reside in Northern Virginia DC area suburbs. (DC Gamecocks Alumni Club)
- **1,064 total students** are enrolled at U of SC as of August 2013. (U of SC Admissions Office)
- **315 freshmen** enrolled for the U of SC Class of 2018 as of June 2014. (U of SC Admissions Office)
- **175 total applications** were collected for gamecock license plates over nine years. (MyCarolina Alumni Association)
- **92 colleges/universities** are represented on license plates in Virginia. (dmvnow.gov)
- **5 states** offered U of SC collegiate plates prior to the campaign: South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Texas and Maryland

## Target Audience

- a. **Primary 1:** Current U of SC students residing in Virginia and their families.
- b. **Primary 2:** U of SC alumni residing in Virginia.
- c. **Secondary 1:** Non-VA resident U of SC students, faculty, staff and administration.
- d. **Secondary 2.** Non-VA resident U of SC students who may someday move to Virginia.

## Challenges & Opportunities

### a. Challenges

- The Virginia DMV challenged The Carolina Agency to collect a minimum of 350 applications and collect a total of at least \$8,750 from current Virginia residents who would buy the gamecock license plates by Dec. 31, 2014. Once this quota was met, the DMV would process the orders and issue the plates to residents.

#### Timing:

- Planning, collaboration and coordination was a lengthy five months. Implementation took place over the next four months. #RideWithPride was suspended in August 2014 because the required applications were received.

#### Logistics:

- Implementation took place during summer months when most students were not on campus/in class.
- Carolina Agency team members had to market awareness of the plates remotely relying heavily on direct mail and social media.
- Summer schedule forced team members to work remotely with many conflicting schedules, protracting responsiveness.

### b. Opportunities

- Because this project was commissioned by the Office of the President, The Carolina Agency team received widespread support throughout many university outlets. The Creative Services Department, MyCarolina Alumni Association and the Educational Foundation all contributed to the overall objective.
- Initial campus response was tremendous, and awareness for the cause spread rapidly. Additionally, having two of the leading project managers based out of Virginia offered considerable advantages for regional marketing.
- A U of SC Educational Foundation grant of \$10,000 was donated to The Carolina Agency to fund the first 350 collegiate gamecock plate fees as well as support additional marketing efforts.

**Armed with the knowledge that the state of Virginia has many die-hard U of SC fanatics both alumni and students, The Carolina Agency created #RideWithPride that reached not only both groups, but prospective U of SC students and fans as well.**

## Goal, Strategy, Objective, Tactics & Outcomes

**Goal:** To raise overall awareness of a U of SC specialty license plate in the state of Virginia.

**Strategy:** Using an Integrated Marketing Communications Campaign, generate sufficient interest in a U of SC collegiate license plates for Virginia residents.

**Objective:** Obtain 350 completed applications for U of SC gamecock plates from current Virginia residents by Dec. 31, 2014.

**Tactic 1- Direct Mail Campaign:** Design and mail informative postcards and application links to all **7,500 U of SC alumni** residing in Virginia.

**Tactic 2- Informational Fliers:** Design and place **500 fliers** around U of SC's campus and on cars with Virginia license plates. This occurred every Tuesday and Thursday morning for two weeks in ten populated campus parking lots.

**Tactic 3- Events Marketing:** Deliver presentations at annual Virginia "freshmen sendoff" events. Virginia had four freshmen sendoff parties in Northern Virginia, Richmond, Charlottesville and Hampton Roads. Team representatives delivered presentations advertising the license plates to incoming freshmen students and their families reaching **more than 200 people**.

**Tactic 4- Email Marketing:** Create an email marketing campaign that reaches all current Virginia U of SC students and all U of SC alumni residing in Virginia. With the help of the Office of the Registrar, the Office of Parent Programs and the Office of Parking services, The team was able to reach an audience of more than **10,000 Virginia gamecocks** via email.

**Tactic 5- Digital Media Strategy:** Develop an interconnected digital media campaign combining both a website and social media to engage Virginia gamecocks and inform them about #RideWithPride. The team created a Facebook page to promote the cause and added photos, which reached an organic audience of **more than 1,000**.

Because digital interactivity was a large component of #RideWithPride, The Carolina Agency team created a website where the DMV application could be accessed and completely filled out online. This allowed for clearer communication from Virginians to South Carolinians. The website received **more than 20,000 unique hits over the course of four months**.

**Tactic 6- Media Relations:** Develop a media relations strategy to obtain coverage in prominent U of SC publications and digital outlets. #RideWithPride was featured in:

- Spurs and Feathers: U of SC Alumni Magazine, **circulation: 16,000+**
- U of SC Today (upcoming): U of SC daily newsletter, **circulation: 8,900**
- U of SC On-Campus Housing: "U of SC Get Connected" Monitor screens, **reach: approximately 6,000**

## Objective: EXCEEDED!

On August 31, 2014, The Carolina Agency team stopped collecting applications for free gamecock license plates. #RideWithPride successfully submitted **391 applications and \$9,775 to the Virginia DMV**.

## Driving Forward

- According to the Virginia DMV, due to processing policies, the gamecock license plates are projected to be mailed to the 391 applicants by June 1, 2015. Subsequently, the plates will be available for ordering at DMVnow.gov by August 2015.
- The Carolina Agency #RideWithPride team will continue to update the #RideWithPride website with DMV updates and timelines.
- Members of The Carolina Agency #RideWithPride team will be consulting with groups of students soliciting U of SC plates in other states as well as groups of students from other universities soliciting collegiate plates in Virginia.

## Conclusion

#RideWithPride began as a campaign to obtain U of SC collegiate license plates for the state of Virginia but proved to be much more. #RideWithPride stimulated interactivity with current Virginia students, U of SC alumni, and even prospective Virginia students. The amount of widespread support and attention from the different channels and U of SC communities was immense and the amount of feedback was far beyond what the university Office of the President expected. Now, a precedent has been set for other states to obtain U of SC license plates. In addition, Virginians across the state will see hundreds of cars driving around with the iconic Carolina gamecock. The U of SC plate will progressively reach all areas of the country.

In nine years, university and alumni volunteers obtained less than half the needed applications to obtain U of SC license plates in Virginia. In nine months, The Carolina Agency #RideWithPride team accomplished this goal and provided this unique opportunity to help promote the University of South Carolina on the roads of Virginia and elsewhere.

## Digital Media

By utilizing Facebook and a webpage and encouraging our target audiences to utilize the #RideWithPride hashtag, we were able to integrate our audiences and communicate effectively across multiple channels.

**Order your FREE plate today! Hurry- only 30 free plates left!**  
\*\*Last updated 8/15/2014

**VA Gamecock plates**  
Are you a VA resident? Request your FREE Gamecock plate today!

**3 Easy Steps!**

1. Click & Download the Block C PDF
2. Fill out only **HIGHLIGHTED** sections.
3. Email Form to [VAlicenseplate@MyCarolina.org](mailto:VAlicenseplate@MyCarolina.org) with subject line "VA Gamecock Plate-(Your last name)" OR mail to:

Are you a current Virginia resident? Would you like to have a block C on your license plate?

VIRGINIA GAMECOCK LICENSE PLATES are FINALLY available!

Best part? The first 350 to apply get theirs FREE. How? Click the block C, download the PDF and send it in to [VAlicenseplate@MyCarolina.org](mailto:VAlicenseplate@MyCarolina.org)

Questions? Contact Paula Novacki at [novacki@email.sc.edu](mailto:novacki@email.sc.edu)

ATTN: Vanessa Hill

Best part? The first 350 to apply get theirs FREE. How? Click the block C, download the PDF and send it in to [VAlicenseplate@MyCarolina.org](mailto:VAlicenseplate@MyCarolina.org)

Questions? Contact Paula Novacki at [novacki@email.sc.edu](mailto:novacki@email.sc.edu) visit us on [Facebook](#)

3. Email Form to [VAlicenseplate@MyCarolina.org](mailto:VAlicenseplate@MyCarolina.org) with subject line "VA Gamecock Plate-(Your last name)" OR mail to:

ATTN: Vanessa Hill  
My Carolina Alumni Association  
1600 Gervais Street  
Columbia, SC 29201

**\*\*How to sign the form correctly\*\***

1. Select "Sign" and wait for the drop down window to appear
2. Select place signature and wait for a box to appear. Upload your signature to the desktop as a .jpg or write it in directly
3. Place the newly added signature to the applicant signature section
4. Date the form.

**Ride With Pride**

You are posting, commenting, and using as Paula Novacki — Change to Ride With Pride

Page Activity Insights Settings Build Audience

**Ride With Pride Community**

Timeline About Photos Likes More

PEOPLE

Post Photo / Video

## Email Marketing

Through email marketing, we were able to reach more than 10,000 Virginia gamecocks thanks to mass emails sent out by the university Office of the Registrar, Parking Services and the MyCarolina Alumni Association.

**From:** "PARKING, PARKING" <PARKING@mailbox.sc.edu>

**Date:** July 24, 2014, 2:46:54 PM EDT

**To:** "PARKING, PARKING" <PARKING@mailbox.sc.edu>

**Subject:** Virginia/USC License Plate

Great news for all Gamecocks who hail from the great Commonwealth of Virginia!

Each time I visit the beautiful Old Dominion state, I'm intrigued by the wide assortment of specialty license plates. In fact, I was surprised to discover that there are quite a few Virginia plates that showcase Clemson—our biggest in-state football rival.

As Gamecocks, we are always up for some friendly competition; consequently, I have exciting news! If you are Gamecock alumni, currently enrolled students, family members or simply big Gamecock fans whose permanent residence is Virginia, you can now proudly display your Gamecock pride with your very own University of South Carolina/Virginia plates!

Thanks to the hard work of our Carolina staff, students at The Carolina Agency, the Virginia DMV and our growing network of alumni and supporters, the University of South Carolina "Block C" Gamecock license plate will soon be available in Virginia! I can't wait to see our colors on Virginia highways.

In order to produce the University of South Carolina plates, the Virginia DMV requires 350 completed applications. So here's more good news! If you are one of the first 350 applicants, you will not have to pay the \$25 Virginia DMV initial specialty plate fee!\* (A generous anonymous donor will pick up the tab!)

To apply for your very own Carolina Gamecock plate, visit <http://www.VaGamecockplates.com>. Simply fill out the highlighted sections of the application and return it. (Don't forget to include your signature and check the box stating you have insurance.)

For additional information, please contact [VALicenseplate@mycarolina.org](mailto:VALicenseplate@mycarolina.org).

Virginia is for Gamecock lovers!



Harris Pastides

\*Disclaimer: The first 350 successful applicants will receive their initial Gamecock license plates free of the VA DMV specialty license plate charge of \$25 per vehicle. This offer does not include other taxes and fees associated with Virginia DMV vehicle registration requirements including, but not limited to: state taxes, vehicle registration and insurance fees.

To qualify for a free VA Gamecock license plate, applicants are responsible for completing and submitting the special VA DMV application at [www.VaGamecockplates.com](http://www.VaGamecockplates.com) as well as all taxes and fees associated with registering a motor vehicle in the state of Virginia. Offer does not include subsequent annual renewal fees for Gamecock license plates in the state of Virginia.

## Email Marketing (cont.)

Mass email sent to all current Virginia students enrolled at U of SC on behalf of the Office of the Registrar 05/2/2014

The screenshot shows an Outlook email interface. At the top, there is a blue navigation bar with 'Outlook', 'Calendar', 'People', and 'Tasks' tabs, along with a user profile icon, a gear icon, and a question mark icon. Below this, the email subject is 'Virginia Resident - FREE Gamecock License Plate Available for Limited Time!'. The sender is 'THE CAROLINA AGENCY <novacki@email.sc.edu>' with a timestamp of 'Fri 5/2/2014 1:24 PM'. The email body contains the following text: 'To: Virginia Student;', 'Are you a current Virginia resident? Would you like to have a block C on your license plate?', 'VIRGINIA GAMECOCK LICENSE PLATES are FINALLY available and President Pastides wants YOU to order one!', 'Best part? The first 350 to apply get theirs FREE. How? Download & fill out the PDF located on [www.VAGamecockplates.com](http://www.VAGamecockplates.com) and follow the simple instructions.', 'Super easy. FREE for a limited time. You're just two minutes away from a FREE Gamecock license plate.', and 'Questions? Contact Paula Novacki at [novacki@email.sc.edu](mailto:novacki@email.sc.edu).'

#RideWithPride Fliers

500 fliers were placed on cars around U of SC's campus and on cars with Virginia license plates for two weeks.

**Current VA Resident?**

Get your **FREE** block  
C license plate  
**TODAY!**



FREE to the  
First 350 applicants!



Order yours now at [www.VAGamecockplates.com](http://www.VAGamecockplates.com)

You're just two minutes away from a free gamecock plate.

Questions? contact Paula Novacki [novacki@email.sc.edu](mailto:novacki@email.sc.edu)



## Media Relations

We developed a media relations strategy that resulted in coverage for #RideWithPride in several publications and digital outlets.

### U of SC On-Campus Housing- “U of SC Get Connected” Monitor Screen

**GAMECOCKS, RIDE WITH PRIDE !  
U of SC license plates now available!**

**Plates available in these states:**

Texas  
Maryland  
North Carolina  
South Carolina  
Georgia  
Virginia



**President Pastides wants you to order yours today!**

Visit:  
[www.mycarolina.org](http://www.mycarolina.org)



**“Spurs & Feathers” Alumni Magazine article (attached).**

## Event and Engagement Photos

Through events marketing and in-person collaboration with DMV officials, we were able to build sustainable relationships with our target audiences ultimately contributing to our campaign success.



A few incoming freshmen at the DC “Freshmen Sendoff Party” after signing up for their free gamecock plates.



Carolina Agency Account Executive Paula Novacki with DMV representatives after submitting 391 applications for plates.



Promotional materials and license plate applications at a U of SC alumni event in Richmond.