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TUSCALOOSA -- Every team needs its leader. For the Capstone Agency, a student-run public relations firm, Jessica Colburn is its leader. As the Capstone Agency's newest director, she had expanded the reach of the agency. The agency now has a broad range of clients from organizations within the university to Orange County, Calif.

With her impressive resume and experience, Colburn is perhaps one of the top students in her field. However, Colburn did not always imagine herself pursuing public relations.

The director of the award-winning firm originally studied nursing at Samford University.

"I wanted to find a job to help people's lives," Colburn said. "I thought being a doctor was the best way to do that."

Colburn wanted to work in a hospital because her mom's friend battled breast cancer for three years before dying. She saw how hospitals helped people. However, Colburn discovered that she was not fit for the field of nursing.

"I soon found out I didn't like blood and guts," Colburn said. "Glad to have discovered that my first semester."

Colburn switched her major to English and began to investigate the business structure of hospitals. She then saw a different side of the hospital—healthcare public relations.

"I found out I can still help people's lives with my skills," she said. "I found out I can help people in PR."

Colburn decided to transfer to the University of Alabama because of the university's top-ranked public relations program. She shadowed classes and fell in love with the university's

opportunities. She particularly grew interested in the LessThanUThink campaign, an anti-binge drinking campaign created by the students of the University of Alabama. She approached Teri Henley, a professor in the advertising and public relations department, to learn more about the possibility of working on the campaign after seeing the LessThanUThink posters on her door.

Henley could not remember when she first met Colburn, but she remembered when Colburn became a member of the Bateman team. Henley was stunned when she discovered that Colburn was not a senior.

“The sky is the limit with Jessica. She can do whatever she puts her mind into,” Henley said. “But what made her really stand out was that she was so eager to get things done right. Some people are eager to get it done, but she was eager to get it right.”

Henley’s recollection of a confident girl is not the same Colburn from the past. At first, Colburn did not see the potential of the Capstone Agency. She could not comprehend how students could produce the same quality of work as professionals. She thought that until she became a member of the Bateman competition team. The Bateman competition was a public relations competition created by the Public Relations Student Society of America. In the competition, students have to create a public relations campaign and execute the campaign.

When she worked closer with the Bateman and the LessThanUThink campaigns, she saw the quality Capstone Agency could offer. She saw that the students of the university had a drive within them. Even without the experience, students could make things work. The university had the resources to help students produce quality work worthy of professionals. With these ideas in mind, Colburn’s dedication and passion for Capstone Agency led her to become the firm’s director in 2012.

Now as the director, Colburn has a new vision. Her goal is addressing what will be the new projects. After the success of LessThanUThink, Colburn and Henley decided to take the campaign nationwide. The campaign is currently being implemented in community colleges in Orange County, Calif. Colburn's vision wanted to spread the firm's services outside the campus. She wanted to work with companies because she believed a student's view was valuable.

For Colburn, this real-world experience is the number one benefit of Capstone Agency. The agency worked with real clients about real issues. Aside from this benefit, Colburn thought the networking she gained from the firm was crucial to her future. She networked with administrators and presidents within the university.

"I didn't just go to the University of Alabama," Colburn said. "I made the University of Alabama my professional network."