



BLOG SERIES ON HOW TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS, BRING P2P 'BIG IDEAS' TO LIFE (NO. 2)

📅 16.08.2017 👤 Stacey 📁 P2P

Professor Jacco Pekelder, winning P2P faculty from the Netherlands, on P2P as a “high point” in career, future plans

As manager of the [Peer to Peer: Challenging Extremism](#) and [Peer to Peer: Facebook Global Digital Challenge programs](#), EdVenture Partners estimates that around 25 percent of P2P teams around the world have continued their work beyond the competition period. By pushing back on online hate, prejudice and extremism — the goals of the P2P programs — some of these student teams have become so compelled with their work that they have gone on to form permanent organizations on their university campus, and some have formed NGOs. Some have gone on to receive grant funding and are still developing educational curriculum, mobile apps, games... and the list goes on.

In this blog series, students and faculty from award-winning teams share advice and lessons learned, in their own words, about how to move a P2P campaign to the next level.

This edition features Dr. Jacco Pekelder, Associate Professor, History of International Relations at Utrecht University (Netherlands), and honorary professor of Contemporary History of Western Europe at Saarland University, Saarbrücken (Germany). In spring 2016, he served as faculty advisor to Utrecht University's [Dare to be Grey](#) team, who [tied for first place](#) at the Peer to Peer: Facebook Global Digital Challenge finals in Washington, D.C.

(1) What was it like to return home after winning P2P?

It was unbelievable. Of course it was summer, and the university had already closed, but early September at the official opening of the academic year we were honored in all speeches. The university's special guest, Secretary Sander Dekker of the Netherlands Department of Education, praised our campaign as an example of what science can do to help change the world. After this high point, some of the team turned again to their studies or to their internships. Others chose to continue the campaign, which made me happy of course.

(2) What were your next steps?

On the one hand, we tried to build a permanent organization for our campaign. As their professor I arranged many conversations of the Dare to be Grey student team within the university, with Utrecht city council's program on polarization and radicalization and with the Department of Education. In fall 2016, the students had a lot of meetings in which they developed a concept business plan. A trainer and consultant specialized in social enterprises and start-ups advised them on how to reach their market. Since then, a team of three has been leading Dare to be Grey, and they were able to attract new volunteers as well.

On the other hand, the students tried to maintain the social media campaign, especially around the national elections in February, when they made short clips in which they dared politicians "to be grey." And they have worked very hard on the content and organization of an original publication, the Grey Magazine. Ultimately, it was presented to the world on a festive celebration of the one-year anniversary of Dare to be Grey at the Academic Hall of Utrecht University.

(3) The magazine has taken off within the past year. How was that concept generated, or what partners presented themselves for that massive undertaking to come to fruition?

Making the magazine was great fun, the students told me. It was fantastic to interview all kinds of people, some of them rather famous, and write other content for the publication. The partner NGO was a printing company that employs several people with personal challenges. The director is very much driven by ideals and already was thinking about projects to help bridge fissures in society when, in March 2016 — right after we had our first newspaper article — he immediately contacted us.

(4) How did you go about receiving invitations for speaking engagements, and are there any that stand out as exceptional experiences?

The team has appeared at a huge number of venues, both in the Netherlands and abroad. Very special was the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Day during United Nations (UN) Week in New York City in September 2016, when we had two appearances and met many people working in the field. It was extraordinary to meet earlier winners from Pakistan and Finland, great people with impressive campaigns. It was interesting to learn that the Finnish team was also building a permanent organization, and they also have faced many challenges along the way.

(5) What advice do you have for other teams who have become passionate about their work and would like to follow in your footsteps to continue their projects? (Advice may be directed to faculty, students or both.)

To begin with, some of the students had the ambition to build a non-profit enterprise that would both maintain

and expand the campaign and sustain some of their livelihoods. Other goals, but these were less ambitious, were more oriented towards turning the campaign into a student association with overturning membership. Utrecht already has many of those. I was fascinated by the prospect of having humanities students build a business, because in the Netherlands at least that is rather uncommon. My advice to faculty would be to organize a formal meeting in which the students have a vote on two or three future plans. It took us a little too long to come to a decision.

(6) Any time management tips that allowed you to pursue this in addition to your many other responsibilities?

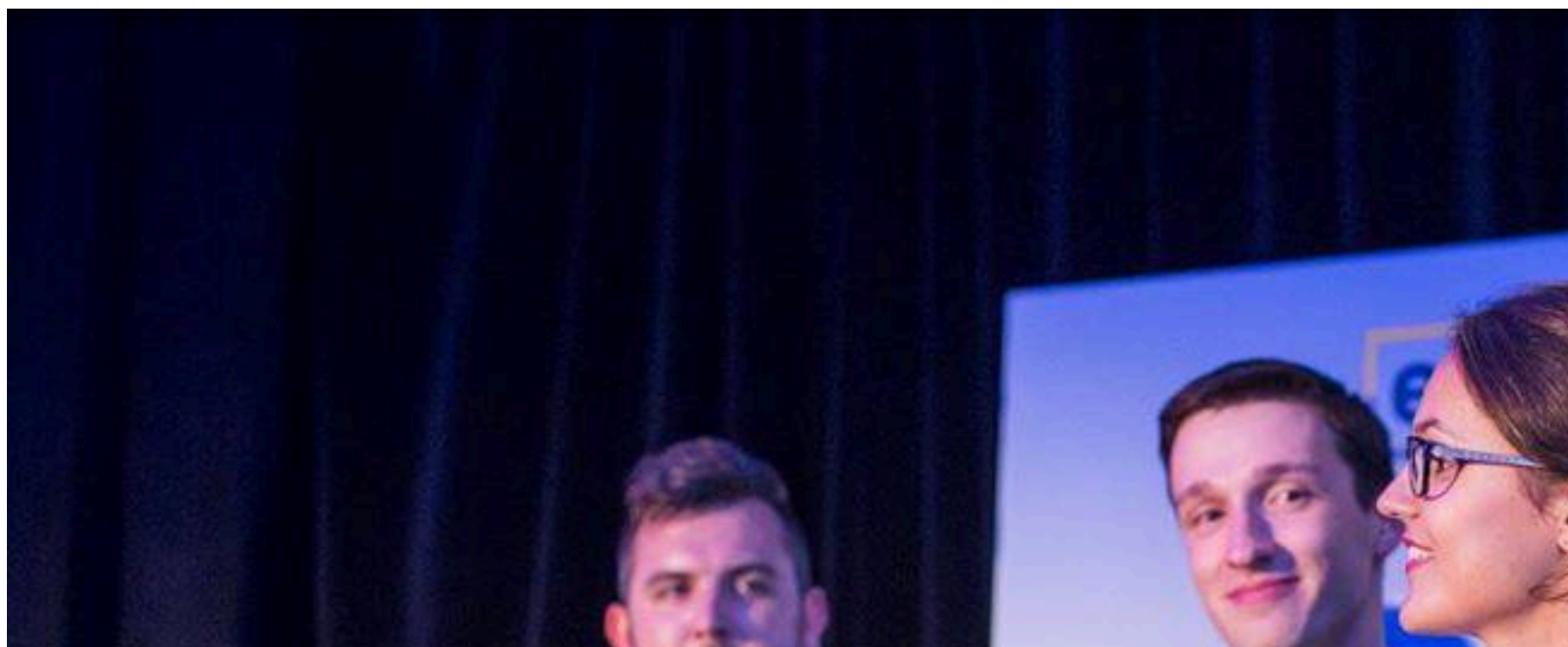
I have gradually retreated to the role of advisor, because I am also in charge of an important new B.A. program in the history of international relations that claims a lot of my attention. This was and is my way to manage time. Still, on average I commit three or four hours a week to Dare to be Grey even as we speak, one full year after the competition. During the first six or seven months I put most of my research on hold, but that cannot continue. The university is a hard place to integrate projects like Challenging Extremism into the normal workload. But you don't hear me complaining. I will always remember it as a high point in my career, and it has recently been a factor in my promotion to associate professor, which is relatively hard to obtain in my department.

(7) What is next on the horizon for you and/or your team (professionally and as it relates to goals you've set for your P2P team's continued work)?

For me personally, together with Jordy, one of the team members, my main aim is to write a scholarly article on the campaign we developed. We aim to relate it to current academic debate on polarization as a breeding ground for radicalization and explain the chances and challenges of a campaign aimed at empowering the "grey middle." The team itself has set a number of goals for the next few months. One of them is professionalizing our presence on the internet, and another is to acquire funding to help sustain the campaign in general and to finance individual projects.

Learn more about the [winning Dare to be Grey campaign](#), check out their [website](#) or follow them on [Facebook](#).

Watch videos celebrating their [one-year anniversary](#) and a [short documentary produced by Utrecht University](#) exploring the team's origination and their continued accomplishments since winning the international competition.





The team was selected to present at United Nations week Sept. 2016. This image is a still from a CNN interview that

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