IgniteFM!

COMPETITION COMES TO THE WORLD OF FM EDUCATION

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People love competition. We revel in the drama of victory or defeat and enjoy recognizing excellence.

Last October, the IFMA Foundation launched IgniteFM!, an exciting event that allows students in facility management degree programs worldwide to compete and demonstrate their expertise.

**Wait, you say there are degrees in FM?**

Yes, indeed! There are colleges and universities around the world offering two- and four-year and graduate degrees in facility management, and these programs are growing. For about 25 years, the IFMA Foundation has been promoting and supporting college education in FM. The foundation created the Accredited Degree Program to ensure that these programs educate students in the broad range of knowledge that the facility manager of tomorrow will need. The foundation's scholarship program assists FM students financially and helps introduce students to the IFMA family including future colleagues, mentors and employers. The IFMA Foundation’s Global Workforce Initiative, GWI, is expanding FM education to community colleges and high schools.

**Inspired by hackathons**

The inspiration for IgniteFM! came from hackathon events that have become popular in computer programming. At hackathons, competing teams of programmers work together to create a fully functioning application in a very short amount of time.

The inaugural IgniteFM! competition was held at World Workplace 2018 in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA. In our FM version, the competition organizers added an additional challenge: Students were assigned to teams with students from other schools whom they had never met. Their first task was to get to know each other and determine how they were going to work together.

The competition organizers wrote a problem statement that entailed a hypothetical company dealing with preparation, response and follow-up to a major hurricane. Although Charlotte was spared during the 2018 hurricane season, this is a real-life situation all too often in the southeast United States during the August-October peak hurricane season.

Student teams were given three hours to solve the problem. By the end of the three-hour period, teams had to submit their presentations to the organizers in Microsoft PowerPoint files. (For students attending World Workplace and other IFMA events, there is tremendous value in the educational and social events, and the organizers did not want student teams being tempted to work all night perfecting their presentations.)

Student teams presented their solutions to the judging panel the next day. Each team had 10 minutes to explain their solution to the problem in a way that was clear, concise and interesting. Teams were judged on critical thinking, the quality of their verbal and visual presentations, and on their knowledge of IFMA’s 11 core competencies. Although it wasn’t a requirement, each team organized their presentations so that every team member delivered part of their respective presentations.
And the winner is...

At the Charlotte competition, the winning group was a team comprised of students from Hanze University in the Netherlands, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Georgia Tech, Texas A&M University and Temple University in Philadelphia. The international representation was indicative of the diversity of the competing students. The team earned a US$2,000 prize, which was presented on the main stage at the closing luncheon of World Workplace. This high-profile recognition was an effective way of connecting IFMA membership with today’s bright FM students.

The future of IgniteFM!

The inaugural IgniteFM! event was a tremendous success. Subsequent competitions were held in Amsterdam, Netherlands, at World Workplace Europe [refer to sidebar] and Facility Fusion in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Plans are underway for a competition at World Workplace 2019 in Phoenix, Arizona, USA.

Although the basic structure of the IgniteFM! competition is set, the competition organizers will continue to experiment with different types of problems and different formats to keep the event fresh and interesting.

So far this year, IgniteFM! succeeded in capturing the imagination of both students and working professionals. It raised the awareness of FM education among IFMA members, and provided a way for FM students to create valuable connections and friendships with their peers at other universities. Finally, and most importantly, it introduced today’s FM community to the facility managers of tomorrow.

IGNITEFM! STUDENT COMPETITION

An additional IgniteFM competition with 12 students from across Europe took place during the World Workplace Europe conference in Amsterdam in March 2019.

The assignment: Answer the question, “What will facility management look like in the smart city of the future?” through a combination of research, interviews, FM knowledge and creativity.

As part of the assignment students needed to:

- Interview a minimum of five participants at the conference to get input for their mission;
- Prove that they used information from a minimum of three sessions that were held during the conference.

The students presented their results digitally to the judging panel. They were also given the opportunity to share a summary of their findings at the end keynote of the conference, which was a great opportunity for them.

The findings from the students were quite varied:

TEAM A

Team A explored what the FM of the future will be doing in tomorrow’s smart city with a focus on technology, including:

- Smart mobility – intelligent transportation system (ITS)
- Big data use
- Smart water management
- Clean energy grid
- Control of emissions
- Smart health care and emergency response

They concluded that smart cities would need to focus on:

- Smart e-governance;
- with smart buildings with smart connectivity;
- that are health stimulating; and
- provide living compliance.
TEAM B
This team looked at the driving factors of technology, people and sustainability.

• They asked what if:
  • People are not open to innovation?
  • We cannot make all cities smart?
  • Virtual reality replaces office workplaces?
  • Earth becomes inhabitable?
  • We achieve zero emission?
  • AI takes over?

We just don’t know.

TEAM C
Team C wanted to keep it human and explored the why, the how and what’s in it for us. They explored the Integrated Experience Management concept – connecting private and work life in a sustainable way, using front-end technology while keeping a human touch

Choosing the winning team was extremely difficult. At one point, the judges were at an impasse. However, we felt that team C was worthy of the prize as they connected the human experience to the smart city of the future. Team C was awarded the prize of €250 each (4 members per team), which was sponsored by Planon and Sodexo.

It was a great experience for all to see what the future of FM looks like through the lens of a student – someone who will help to develop the design and management of our future cities/buildings.

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