



ILLINOIS WESLEYAN
UNIVERSITY

COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT WORK GROUP
Final Report Feb. 21, 2014

INTRODUCTION

The C&E Work Group, convened by Matt Kurz, assessed progress made since the 2006 Strategic Plan's Identity Goal and Strategies were adopted. Based on the work group's assessment of progress made, four subgroups developed strategies to better engage stakeholders and key audiences:

- Branding and Core Communications Channels (Sherri McElroy and Kathy Lewton)
- Campus community (Stephanie Davis-Kahl, Tony Bankston and Van Miller)
- Prospective students (McElroy, Pat Palmer, Rebekkah Erickson and Tarra Simpson)
- Alumni (Lewton, Josh Butts and Fred Hoyt)

The four subgroups:

- Solicited input on progress and issues with those engaged in our communications programs
- Examined a range of secondary research
- Conducted original research and brand audits
- Identified best practices from peer and aspirational institutions
- Reviewed their recommendations with the full C&E Work Group and groups with an interest in proposals

RECOMMENDATIONS

C&E recommendations include an overall strategic goal and goals, strategies and recommended initiatives in the four key strategic areas noted above. In addition, we have included timelines or other metrics, information on process/methodology and subgroup insights into the rationale for these recommendations. Following you will find:

1. Overall Communications and Engagement Strategic Goal
2. Key Goals, Strategies and Initiatives for
 - a. Branding and Core Communications Channels,

- b. Campus Community,
- c. Prospective Students and
- d. Alumni

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIC GOAL

Engage University stakeholders and key external audiences via an *integrated program of communications and experiences* that tell and demonstrate the Illinois Wesleyan story.

BRANDING AND CORE CHANNELS

Strategic Goal:

Clarify and expand the reach of the university brand to include not only communication media, but also the experiences of specific audiences both on and off campus by developing an integrated branding program to engage audiences and stakeholders.

Strategies and Initiatives:

Strategy 1-A: Adopt a brand management approach that considers (or is built on consideration of) key audiences' perspectives. Given that experiences are built on perception, the brand management should adopt the audiences' perspective, and test communications accordingly.

Initiatives:

1. Revisit current communications messaging to identify and evaluate existing brand identity and promise, and realign if needed.
2. Define management and communication processes that strive to deliver messages and service experiences consistent with our branding truth.

3. Hire an external expert to conduct journey map studies to improve audience experiences. This study should identify how key audiences interact with the University through various touch points, and should also identify how to improve those interactions by clarifying circumstances when the message and experience are not consistent with our branding truth.
4. Increase resources for managing the brand by realigning or expanding current staff or engaging external consultants.

Strategy 1-B: Enhance the University's website, our primary communications channel with external audiences, so that it effectively conveys our brand essence and provides positive user experiences by delivering easily accessed, effectively presented and meaningful information.

Initiatives:

1. Conduct web user research in 2014-15 to better understand
 - a. Priorities and needs of specific audiences by gauging their attitude toward technology and their motivation for using the site, e.g., Are they seeking specific information? Are they engaging in a specific transaction? Are they trying to understand the IWU story?
 - b. Best web strategy for specific audiences by considering whether we want to elicit an emotional and/or sensory response, stimulate the intellect, identify with a community or social group or motivate one to act.
2. Increase resources for both active and interactive communication and engagement on the web, including video, social media, and other digital media and innovative technologies by
 - a. Realigning current Communications staff responsibilities and priorities beginning in 2014-15 to place greater focus on digital communications and services provided to University departments.

3. To ensure consistency and currency of content moving forward, charge Communications with oversight responsibility for enhancing the website's content and design, with a focus on *web pages that have the greatest impact on prospective students*, as identified by Admissions.
4. In consultation with the Web Advisory Group, develop new web content guidelines/ policies and new web page templates to provide more consistent, focused and compelling content and design, as part of 2014 website redesign.

CAMPUS COMMUNITY

The recommendations below are based on a survey of students, faculty and staff on campus as well as a series of discussions within the sub-group as well as discussions with the Communications & Engagement group as a whole. The survey showed that in many areas, communication on campus is strong and effective. There are areas in which significant realignment of staffing and priorities could address new areas of need and improve the flow of information between key campus offices to reduce redundancy and streamline operations. The sub-group acknowledges that some of these efforts are underway already. Overall, our group found that transparency, timeliness and consistency of message are key to successful communication, and these tenets should be core to any communication plan on campus.

Strategic Goal:

Enhance communication efforts and information sharing to build a strong institutional culture and close-knit campus community.

Strategies and Initiatives:

Strategy 2-A: To keep the campus community engaged, increase awareness and access to news and events via all channels of communication, beginning in 2014-15.

Initiatives:

1. Ensure that those without access to website and email (e.g. Physical Plant) are kept informed about important news and events via other communications channels.
2. Create one centralized location for faculty and staff to send good news, honors, awards, information about news and events to be collected and shared with the campus community via University Communications, Admissions, Advancement, departmental or program websites, and social media (e.g., one channel that numerous offices can access to create news releases, etc.).
3. Promote greater awareness of all the various communication channels and their best practices

Strategy 2-B: Create a campus culture of information sharing, collaboration and research, beginning in 2014-15.

Initiatives:

1. Continue to streamline communication between key administrative offices to increase information sharing and collaboration and reduce redundancy.
2. Create a dedicated events video production unit in collaboration with University Communications, The Ames Library and Information Technology Services that would be staffed and resourced adequately to capture campus events and performances for educational, archival, informational and promotional purposes.
3. Conduct and share the results of an annual communications audit to measure the impact of internal communications programs and gain feedback and input from the campus community.

4. Conduct research to learn how peer/aspirant institutions are working to inform their communities to identify best practices and benchmark our own efforts.

Strategy 2-C: Working in collaboration with Human Resources, incorporate institutional history, traditions, values and core messages into the orientation process for new employees beginning in the fall 2014.

PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

The following recommendations are based on an extensive review of research findings and other sources. These are described in detail in Appendix A of this report.

Strategic Goal:

Enhance Illinois Wesleyan University's recruitment efforts by informing and engaging prospective students with meaningful narratives describing the value of an IWU experience. Given that the pragmatic and grounded millennial generation aligns with brands that clearly define its character, attention should be given to consistent experiences and narratives that exude the IWU undergraduate advantage.

Strategies and Initiatives:

Strategy 3-A: Clarify and simplify the message of IWU's purpose to enhance its relevance and resonance with the prospective student audience.

Initiatives

1. Define the brand character and personality. Print materials and website should be distinctive and leave the reader/visitor with a clear idea of IWU's character and personality. The *Pursue Your Passions* message is not always related to outcomes in the materials. (Also, other schools are using the same tag line.) In some cases the viewer is left with the impression of an unfulfilled promise. We need to define and clarify the promise.

2. Create a narrative, a true brand story that elicits an emotional response from prospective students. Progress has been made in telling the IWU story in the videos on the website. These videos need to be dominant in prospective students visit to the website. Repeat these stories in print materials. In some cases the stories can be found in the print material and on the web site, but they are not “front and center”—one has to dig to find them in the plethora of facts and statistics.
3. Clearly define the IWU experience benefit as: the undergraduate advantage. We should emphasize, “You will not have a teaching assistant for an instructor.” Isn’t this fact important? Isn’t it crucial to communicate that you will probably have a professor in your major for MORE than one class to monitor your growth and progress?
4. Conduct research among prospective students in 2014-15 to gain insights into the strength of our “undergraduate advantage” and how best to simplify and clarify our brand story.

Strategy 3-B: Create website content and publications that are user-focused, authentic and well organized.

Initiatives:

1. Conduct scheduled website usability studies with prospective students, to ensure that important information is easily found and the user experience is positive.
2. Conduct periodic qualitative studies to determine if the content is enlisting the desired emotional response.
3. Expand use of video on the website and in digital communications to communicate the IWU narrative.
4. Incorporate these ideas and practices into the 2014 and future website

redesign projects.

Strategy 3-C: Conduct journey mapping or digital ethnographic studies of touch points in the college selection process. These studies would follow prospective students on their journey in the process, as they learn more about IWU through a variety of communications such as IWU publications, the web site, and the face-to-face meeting with members of the campus community. This study would provide valuable feedback about the experiences of prospective students and their families.

Initiatives:

1. Expand and affirm the list of contact between IWU and prospective students. (See a preliminary list below in the EXPERIENTIAL TOUCH POINTS section.)
2. Hire an external group to conduct the journey mapping study to gain insights on whether we have alignment between our communication and the experience of the prospective students.
3. Integrate findings into the communication touch points and behaviors of the community.

Strategy 3-D: A Conduct thoughtful trend scans around millennial generation values, concerns, and information sources as they make decisions about college choices.

Initiatives:

1. The campus community has information about our current student satisfaction level, but there are neither processes nor procedures in place to share information about why students are dissatisfied. We need to address and fix these issues before they become a huge problem.
2. Create a procedure for anyone in the campus community to make a suggestion to Cabinet level management when one becomes aware of an issue related to student recruitment or retention.
3. Periodically conduct qualitative studies of current students to monitor

progress of student-centered initiatives.

4. Conduct annual student satisfaction surveys to learn what we are doing right and what issues need to be addressed, and share the results and recommended action plans with faculty and staff.

ALUMNI

These recommendations are based on substantial fact-finding interviews with individuals at IWU who are involved in alumni communications at several levels, and personal interviews with alumni program leaders at peer group schools and those identified as having best in class alumni programs.

Schools contacted are all private liberal arts schools; all but one are in the Midwest, all except one have 30% or higher (up to 60%) alumni giving participation, majority are comparable in size to IWU; several have similar staffing but those with smaller staffs are adding resources to ramp up efforts. Most have made alumni engagement a top university investment priority, with commitment from President and Board.

These recommendations reflect the philosophy, which was detailed in the comprehensive annual fund strategic plan developed a year ago, that

*Alumni are one of a university's most precious assets,
and investing in alumni engagement produces significant results.*

Alumni are not only the essential foundation for fund-raising, but also provide a corps of talented and committed volunteers who can supplement and augment staff and faculty efforts in and out of classroom (from student recruitment, to career development, classroom presentations, and all points in between). An engaged network of alumni can serve as the University's best example of the value of an IWU degree, and can also provide a tangible benefit to students in terms of career counseling, mentoring, internships, employment opportunities and more.

Strategic Goal:

Grow and strengthen our community of engaged, involved and committed alumni who support IWU through contributions of time, talent and treasure, and through these contributions, strengthen our financial stability, augment student recruitment and the student experience, support life beyond IWU, including career development, and produce many other tangible and intangible benefits.

Strategies and Initiatives:

Strategy 4-A: Make alumni relationships a top University commitment, using a best-practices model based on a strategic plan. This plan should engage all areas of the University involved in communicating to and working with alumni. This program should *invest* sufficient resources to generate ROI via alumni engagement (both financial contributions and volunteer talent and time to support admissions, career programs, the university's educational mission etc.).

Those best practices include:

- a. Creating a focus that goes beyond alumni events and one-way communications to true alumni engagement across all parts of the campus, including a centralized approach/source to linking alumni to opportunities ranging from admissions to academics to career development to fund-raising, etc.
- b. Broadening our affinity group approach, to an *inclusive, all alumni class-focused* approach, executed via:
 - i. Class-focused efforts that begin with early recruitment of class leaders and creation of class spirit during undergraduate years.
 - ii. Class leadership committees to provide volunteers to help plan and execute activities.
- c. Exploration of a comprehensive reunion program (multi-day, apart from Homecoming, all 5-year classes have class events, etc.)

- d. Actively involving faculty in alumni engagement efforts.
 - i. Involve faculty in doing what they do best – sharing knowledge – with our alumni as the beneficiaries, on a national and worldwide basis using contemporary communications channels.
- e. Enhancing our alumni engagement index to increasingly capture alumni involvement throughout the university, by including as much information as possible (i.e., alumni who speak to classes or provide support to academic departments (data to be provided by faculty), alumni who provide support to Greek or other campus organizations, alumni who assist in student recruitment, etc.) and to include information on current students, who are the university's future leaders. . This index can be used as another metric (along with major donors, participation by class, etc.) to publicly recognize, celebrate and thus encourage alumni engagement,

Strategy 4-B: Use data to drive program development and monitor progress.

Initiatives:

1. Conduct major benchmark study and follow-up studies in subsequent years to identify alumni awareness, attitudes, perceptions, communications preferences and satisfaction with their undergraduate and alumni experiences.
2. To ensure that appropriate and timely data is available to achieve the items listed above, invest in appropriate resources for data management, without which few of these strategies can be fully recognized.
 - a. All involved in enhancing alumni engagement need timely access to easy-to-understand data and records. While there should be one source responsible for data collection and management, staffed so that data can be gathered and made available in a timely way for everything from segmented mailings to event planning, additional

individuals and functions who are involved in outreach to alumni need to be able to access data (within privacy guidelines) and provide data to the central data source.

Strategy 4-C: Build-out communications channels to harness power of social media (particularly with younger classes) using digital channels to reach and engage alumni worldwide (faculty and alumni-taught webinars, etc.).

Strategy 4-D: Enhance the effectiveness of alumni programming via campus-wide coordination and collaboration.

Initiatives:

1. If a decentralized communications model is continued at IWU, with multiple offices and functions** responsible for specific channels or pieces of alumni communications, create core messages that are routinely and consistently used by all those who communicate with alumni, and assign one designated point of responsibility for coordinating information being disseminated via all channels.

**Advancement, Alumni Affairs, Annual Fund, University Communications, Office of the President, academic departments, campus programs (athletics, etc.)

2. Align and coordinate alumni engagement and fund-raising activities so they work from a common core of strategies, messages and carefully orchestrated activities to leverage the impact of each activity.
3. Collaborate with other appropriate IWU departments, such as student affairs, career services, office of the provost, in planning and executing alumni engagement efforts.

Alumni Metrics:

- University-wide alumni engagement plan is in place by end of 2014.

- Alumni engagement index scores increase on a yearly basis after benchmarking year.
- Alumni participation in annual giving reaches 30% by 2020, with resulting increase in dollars given.
- Alumni satisfaction scores increase as measured by periodic research studies.

APPENDIX A

Details on process and sources used by the prospective student subgroup.

1. RESEARCH

In 2007, IWU retained the Lawlor Group to conduct an identity Assessment assignment as one part of the overall strategic planning effort.

- Please review the findings of the quantitative data.

<http://www.iwu.edu/communications/identity/quant-study-prospects.pdf>

- Please compare these findings with current research.

<http://www.iwu.edu/communications/identity/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

Student View Prospective Student Research

- Illinois Wesleyan's overall awareness and perception scores declined somewhat in the

past year, causing the University to lose ground versus benchmark competitors.

- Among all demographic and geographic segments, Illinois Wesleyan's areas of greatest strength include students majoring in physical therapy, marketing, and biology, students

from northern Illinois, excluding the Chicago metro area, and students with ACT scores

of 27-32. While the University earned its highest market position scores in these segments, its ranking in each of these segments was similar to or only modestly better than its rank among all students.

- Illinois Wesleyan earned its highest attribute scores for academic strength, campus safety, and appearance. Its lowest scores are for size and tuition. Compared with benchmark competitors, Illinois Wesleyan tended to be equivalent or moderately advantaged in areas where it received high scores, and equivalent or somewhat disadvantaged where it received low scores.

- Thirty four percent of students considered attending Illinois Wesleyan, while 4% actually applied. Compared with several benchmark competitors, the University's consideration level is "normal", but the application level appears to be low.

- The primary barriers to considering attending Illinois Wesleyan include tuition cost, cited by 36% of students, and small size, cited by 26%. Among the other barriers, low

academic standards and a perceived lack of majors were each cited by 16% of students.

Lipman Hearne Prospective Student Research

- Students seeking bachelor's degree-granting schools: These students saw small class size as more important than offering a wide variety of majors.

- Top information sources used by prospective students are: direct marketing, word of mouth and college search site (such as cappex.com)

- Top information sources used by majority of respondents to learn about a college/university: E-mail from college, letter from a college, cappex.com, postcards

- Most frequently visited web site pages are: home page, admissions page

- In the social media category 40% of students visited Facebook to learn about colleges/universities

- The majority of respondents (58%) had seen an advertisement for one of their preferred college with online/banner ads and billboards being two types most frequently noticed.

Prospective Students Search Concept Test

- 1500 prospective students were asked which statement would make you most interested in learning more about the university being described? 40% chose the statement: This is a university where you will discover and pursue your passions in life.

Inside Higher Education Parent Survey

- About one-third (34 percent) of parents said they were very likely to restrict the colleges to which their child applies for admission because of what the institutions charged in tuition and fees; another 34 percent said they were somewhat likely to do so.
- One in five parents (20 percent) said that they were unwilling to accumulate any loan debt for their child's undergraduate education. But on the other end of the spectrum, another fifth (21 percent) said they would be willing to accumulate \$50,000 or more in college loan debt for their child. By contrast, only 1 percent of college admissions directors told Inside Higher Ed last fall that \$50,000 in undergraduate loan debt was reasonable for a student to accumulate.
- Nearly four in 10 parents (38 percent) said getting a good job is the reason why their child will get education beyond high school.
- Three in 10 (31 percent) strongly agreed that there are ways other than going to college that could lead their child to a good job.
- Four in 10 (43 percent) strongly agreed that a vocational, professional or technical certificate or degree program could lead their child to a good job.
- Less than 3 in 10 (28 percent) strongly agreed they were confident that a liberal arts education could lead their child to a good job.
- More parents strongly disagreed (27 percent) than strongly agreed (20 percent) that their child's chances for admission to college could be hurt by affirmative action policies; parents of black students are far likelier (53 percent) than are parents of white (23 percent) and Hispanic (26 percent) students to strongly disagree that their child's chances for admission to college could be hurt.

3. Identify any conflicting data you find in comparing current data vs. 2007 Lawlor data.

For example: Compare the most common source for information in 2007 vs. Lipman-Hearne data from 2013:

2007: 97% chose “brochures,mailings” as channel of information in a college search.

2013: 93% chose “word of mouth” as channel of information in a college search.

2. IDENTITY AUDIT materials seen by prospective students

1. Evaluate the following channels of information for prospective students

Web site: <http://www.iwu.edu/admissions>

Printed materials: provided by Matt Kurz

2. Evaluate the channels using the following questions:

- Is the piece/site/medium communicating the five core messages? (see below)
- Is there a consistent brand message?
- Do brand identifiers (logo, color, photos, sound) make it immediately recognizable?
- Is the information organized, easy to access?
- Is the content/organization designed to give the user what he wants?
- Does the brand story emotionally resonate with the audience (prospective students)?
- Does the brand differentiate IWU from peer group and competing universities?

Guidelines: <http://www.iwu.edu/communications/>

Core Messages:

Successful alumni who make a difference across the nation and around the world. This message speaks to the outcome (success) of an Illinois Wesleyan education, the kind of graduates that we produce (engaged) and our national and global presence (alumni in 50 states and 52 countries) that connotes a national reputation.

Tradition of academic excellence in teaching, scholarship, research and artistic endeavors. Academic excellence is especially important for a private institution such as ours. This message speaks to our long history of academic excellence, which is at our core and represented in all that our faculty and students do.

Distinctive curriculum with a liberal arts focus and strong professional programs. It is our curriculum, with its strong liberal arts focus that extends across well-regarded professional schools and programs, which helps to distinguish us from more limited liberal arts institutions and positions us to compete with larger institutions.

Committed to individual attention for students inside and outside the classroom. This message helps to differentiate us from larger schools that we often compete with, and it communicates a key aspect of the Illinois Wesleyan experience that is highly valued by our students and graduates.

An engaged and welcoming community that values diversity in people, ideas and experiences. This message helps to communicate the character, personality and values of the institution and its people.

3. Identify EXPERIENTIAL TOUCH POINTS of prospective students

Off-campus

Friends/Family

High School Guidance Counselor

High School Coach

College Fair

College Search web sites

IWU web site

Admissions publications: view book, postcards, brochures

College Rankings

Admissions counselor: college fair & high school visits

Press/media releases

On-campus

Individual tour

Titan weekend

Faculty open house

Multi-cultural weekend

Class visit

Scholar Day weekend

Visit with faculty member

OTHER Communication

Email

Text

US mail

4. BEST PRACTICE

Showing university values on the homepage: <http://wp.stolaf.edu/>

Telling specific and relevant stories/narratives on the homepage:
<http://www.kenyon.edu/>

Alumni engagement & resources: Carleton's alumni page is a good resource for alumni and can be searched by region/interest/year/etc:
<http://apps.carleton.edu/alumni/>.