# UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

2020-2021 Strategic Plan

Western Carolina UNIVERSITY

## MISSION STATEMENT

Western Carolina University is a public regional institution of higher education whose mission is to create learning opportunities that incorporate teaching, research, service, and engagement through on-campus, off-campus, online and international experiences. The University focuses its undergraduate, master's and three doctoral programs, educational outreach, research, creative, and cultural activities to sustain and improve individual lives and enhance economic and community development in Western North Carolina and beyond.

## VISION STATEMENT

Western Carolina University will be a national model for student learning and engagement that embraces its responsibilities as a regionally engaged university.

## CORE VALUES

Western Carolina University is committed to excellence in teaching and learning, collaboration with respect for our communities, free and open interchange of ideas, responsible stewardship, organizational and environmental sustainability and cultural diversity and equal opportunity. These are the values that guide our approach to education and service daily.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

During the 2020 Opening Assembly, Chancellor Brown outlined three priorities that she believes we must bring attention to:

- **Academic Integrity and Quality**
  Provide our students with a rigorous curriculum that is composed of the intellectual, creative, cultural, and personal outcomes necessary to advance and excel.

- **Economic Development**
  Deepen our commitment to regional, economic, and community engagement as connected to our higher education mission.

- **Diversity and Inclusive Excellence**
  Create a campus reflective of our core values and offer curricular and cocurricular educational programs that prepare our students for the diverse world in which they live.

## ROLE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

University Communications and Marketing is charged with strengthening WCU's positive reputation and increasing awareness of its many accomplishments. To do this, we:

- Highlight the academic rigor, collaborative research, vibrant student life, contributions to our community, commitment to service, athletic prowess, diversity and inclusion, and the overall achievements of the broad University community, including students, faculty, staff, alumni and others.

- Share the University story with key audiences by using owned, earned, paid and social media programs.

- Develop strategic communications, content, marketing plans, campaigns and events that support the University's highest priorities and address market challenges.

- Steward and increase the value of the WCU brand through a robust brand platform, a coherent visual identity system, and participation in an established licensing and trademark management program.

- Special events support multiple layers of events on behalf of WCU, the Chancellor and the Chancellor's Division. The annual event program is segmented fairly equally between direct support of Chancellor, internal WCU facing events and external WCU branded events.

| Strengths | Weaknesses | Opportunities | Threats |
|---|---|---|---|
| Location and campus beauty | Rural location | In-demand degrees | Diversity at WCU, including faculty/staff and programs |
| Strong academic mentorship | Historical perception as fallback option | Campus and community development | Competitors |
| Growth | Capacity for growth | Positive national media attention for initiatives, faculty/student expertise and research | Federal and state funding |
| Executive leadership | Lack of a cohesive marketing and communications strategy across the University | Promotion of Asheville site | Negativity: Burnout of overworked staff |
| Talented and dedicated staff | Lack of diversity and inclusion (silos and staff diversity) | New leadership providing strategy and direction | Lack of institutional buy-in (units doing their own marcom) |
| Staff and leadership open to new ideas and innovation | Lack of strategy and cohesion in brand messaging | Create new processes and utilize new platforms to help eliminate physical and mental silos | University not having a clear understanding of UCM's role in support |
| Flexible work environment | Unclear direction and strategy | Internal reorganization | |
| Speed and agility to complete projects under deadline | Lack of communication with one another, across teams, or even within teams | Refresh the brand and re-establish UCM as 'keepers' to provide consistency | |
| | Reactionary mindset rather than a proactive one | Marketing and Communications staff outside of UCM | |
| | Lack of university-wide styleguide | Strengthen relations with units across campus to improve UCM reputation | |
| | | Utilizing messaging and visuals effectively across our teams. Unifying as one collaborative department | |
| | | Increase transparency of processes and procedures within department | |

# GOALS

University Communications and Marketing will provide integral support across our team to plan, coordinate, deploy, measure and report our efforts in support of the following goals, ensuring the greatest degree of collaboration, quality and efficacy.

## GOAL 1: EXERCISE EXCELLENCE AND BEST PRACTICE IN COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

### Target Audiences

WCU chancellor and executive staff; University Communications and Marketing staff; MarCom Council and the broader MarCom community.

**In support of this goal**, University Communications and Marketing's priorities will be to:
- Establish a professional development plan that grows relevant skill sets across our organization and ensures our staff is adept at creating content for modern marketing and communications platforms.
- Interact with peer institutions through conferences and benchmarking, learn best practices for learning and promotion of WCU's marketing and communications excellence.
- Use new office space to promote a culture that values collaboration, ideation, celebration, risk-taking and mentoring.
- Quarterly examine organizational structure to ensure contemporary practice and continuous improvement of work.
- Set accountability and performance measures for each staff member.
- Maintain a comprehensive strategy for engaging the marketing and communications community across the University.
- Make regular assessments of the tools, services and applications we use to support our work, including for project management, digital asset management, surveys, social media monitoring, third-party hosting, proactive media outreach, media subscriptions, etc.
- Improve work processes and restructure to set up each staff member for success.
- Develop a robust internship experience that prepares students for entry-level professional work.

### Objectives for Communications
- Create and mature a best-in-class content curation strategy that aligns our internal teams and coordinates closely with stakeholders across the University.
- Serve as a role model and resource for offering communications across the University.
- Develop a robust and connected media relations strategy to target influencers and members of the media to build and grow relationships that result in positive and accurate coverage and amplify our news.
- Maintain alignment among the University's strategic priorities, the content plan and our proactive media strategies.
- Benchmark best practices in other industries and ensure an innovative and contemporary approach to crisis communications.
- Report earned media and estimated publicity value on a monthly basis.
- Assist in the development of a robust social media plan.
- Set accountability and performance standards for each team member.
- Establish a schedule for focus groups, one-on-one meetings, and surveys with our target audiences (current students, alumni, faculty/staff, community leaders and media influencers).
- Assist in the development of a sound internship experience, providing hands-on learning for all aspects of communications at WCU.

**Objective for Creative Services**
- Demonstrate best practice and continuous evolution of the WCU brand in concepting, design, photography, video production and writing.
- Review processes and continually assess best approaches to project management, creative brief usage, and managing video and photo assets.
- Refresh the branding guidelines and host an annual branding summit (event or in-house video) for the University community. Better understand the pulse of the University community (students, alumni, faculty/staff) for new 'marks' – what does a polished two-eyed cat look like, how does it resonate with our community and potentially impact our licensing royalties?
- Improve the marketing request form to align with the strategic goals of the University and goals for UCM, based on this plan.
- Report web traffic, most visited pages, keywords, and areas for improvement on a monthly basis.
- Assist in the development of a robust social media plan.
- Set accountability and performance standards for each team member.
- Assist in the development of a sound internship experience, providing hands-on learning for all aspects of creative services at WCU.

**Objectives for Marketing and Special Events**
- Serve as the leader for departmental team members' understanding of data-driven decision-making by expanding capacity in market research, measurement and analysis.
- Lead efforts that bring added value to marketers across the University, through centralized approaches that offer economies of scale, negotiated pricing, vetting and sourcing of marketing-related vendors of benefit to WCU; and overall stewardship of the brand user community and brand guidelines.
- Develop a comprehensive marketing plan (includes audiences, messaging and advertising/media buy) in coordination with University stakeholders (admissions, athletics, advancement and chancellor's office, etc.).
- Lead the development for a robust social media plan.
- Assist in refreshing the brand guidelines and host an annual branding summit (event or in-house video) for the University community. Better understand the pulse of the University community (students, alumni, faculty/staff) for new 'marks' – what does a polished two-eyed cat look like, how does it resonate with our community and potentially impact our licensing royalties?
- Implement a tool for measuring branding sentiment, establish a schedule for focus groups, one-on-one meetings, and surveys with our target audiences (current/prospect students and parents, faculty/staff, regional community members).
- Set accountability and performance standards for each team member.
- Assist in the development of a sound internship experience, providing hands-on learning for all aspects of marketing at WCU.
- Design and produce key WCU events that support the Chancellor's initiatives and communication efforts to internal stakeholders including Opening Assembly, New Faculty & Staff Welcome, Faculty & Staff Excellence Awards, Employee Appreciation Day, Alpha Lambda Delta Reception, Student Leaders, SHRA and EHRA Holiday Open House, Full Professors Reception, Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award Finalists Reception and more.
- Support team development efforts with logistical and creative help from team building activities to social events.
- Recruit, train and manage intern and student workers in the field of event planning.
- Research and recommend best practices in the college event industry, virtual event space and report trends and ideas quarterly.

# GOAL 2: INCREASE THE VALUE AND EQUITY OF THE WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY BRAND

**Target Audiences**

WCU students, faculty and staff; alumni; donors; prospective students, faculty and staff; media; elected officials (local, state and federal); federal agencies/grantors; business and industry partners; peers; and North Carolina residents.

**In support of this goal,** University Communications and Marketing's priorities will be to:

- Highlight the academic rigor, collaborative research, vibrant student life, contributions to our community, commitment to service, athletic prowess, and the overall achievements of our broad University community, including students, faculty, staff, alumni and others.
- Build and strengthen relationships and key partners across the University.
- Foster a culture of sharing, formalizing ways to better collaborate across all University departments.
- Promote the university reflective of our core values and offer curricular and cocurricular educational programs that prepare our students for the diverse world in which they live (diversity and inclusion priority).

**Objectives for Communications**

- Build a Communications/Content Plan that includes a strategy for prioritizing areas of focus, messaging, audiences and distribution strategies.
- Support a social media program that, in concert, advance strategic priorities and grow audiences for our owned content and amplify positive external content.
- Implement a focused, proactive media relations strategy targeting the highest priority stories and audiences.
- Protect the University's reputation in times of crisis or while managing difficult issues or events.

**Objectives for Creative Services**

- Develop a cohesive, distinguishing and timeless style and tone through design, video, photography and marketing copy that communicates clearly, is authentic and dynamic, and presents WCU in a unique and compelling way.
- Integrate creative deliverables with content produced by Communications for use on owned media channels and with Marketing to support reputational work, targeted campaigns, advertising, digital and video content needs.
- Assist in the development of a Communications/Content Plan that includes a strategy for prioritizing areas of focus, messaging, audiences and distribution strategies.
- Critically review and evolve brand expression and visual identity.

**Objectives for Marketing and Special Events**

- Seek insights from Institutional Assessment, Admissions, units engaged in faculty and staff recruitment, deans and vice chancellors, and others, in order to coordinate and calibrate marketing strategies based on the University's strategic priorities.
- Extend and define the next generation of WCU brand management, continuing to evolve and build adoption, with an increasing partnership with key areas including Admissions, Athletics, Facilities Management and the University's schools and major divisions.
- Support a robust trademark and licensing program, guided by best practices to help steward the institution's marks and visual identity and increase revenue from licensed merchandise and other associated intellectual property, and greatly improve revenue.

- Strategically assess the best opportunities for brand visibility through paid media, sponsorships, and specialized merchandise.
- Assist in the development of a Communications/Content Plan that includes a robust strategy for prioritizing areas of focus, messaging, audiences and distribution strategies.
- Protect the University's reputation in times of crisis or while managing difficult issues or events.
- Design and produce key WCU events that support the Chancellor's initiatives and communication efforts to external stakeholders including Board of Trustees meeting & receptions, Foundation board meetings & receptions, Football home games in the Chancellor's Box with pre and post-game receptions, Retiree Luncheon, Commencement and more.
- Design and produce Mountain Heritage Day, annual fall festival generating 15K+ visitors to campus providing WCU the opportunity to have a significant presence in the community reflective of our commitment to the people and history of our region.
- Partner with academic offices to support in the design and production of major academic events such as groundbreakings and dedications, high-level candidate search efforts, and key campus academic initiatives.
- Maintain a standard of excellence and brand awareness in all WCU sponsored events managed from the Chancellors Division.
- Serve as a resource to campus partners in their efforts to create events around campus priorities and our core values.

## GOAL 3: POSITIVELY INFLUENCE WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY'S PERCEPTION AMONG KEY AUDIENCES

**Target Audiences**

WCU students, faculty and staff; alumni; donors; prospective students, faculty and staff; media; elected officials (local, state and federal); federal agencies/grantors; business and industry partners; peers; and North Carolina residents.

**In support of this goal,** University Communications and Marketing's priorities will be to:
- Develop focused distribution strategies for delivering stories across owned, paid, social and earned media to effectively reach and influence key audiences.
- Define and implement best practices for targeting specific audiences, with a goal to streamline and create efficient and engaging communications that reach audiences using the right tools and messaging at the right time.
- Expand a research-based approach to testing impact and efficacy of communications and marketing programs.

**Objectives for Communications**
- Refine and organize the WCU institutional narrative in ways that are strategic in distribution and focused on the audience.
- Further enhance storytelling approaches and styles that leverage and extend staff strengths.
- Develop and execute targeted, proactive media outreach, including a bimonthly oped series, that positions the chancellor and key WCU leaders as regional and national experts on strategic priorities.
- Use analytics, user testing, surveys and other data from students, faculty, staff, alumni, community leaders and media influencers to:
    - o Assess the effectiveness of our communications efforts.
    - o Gain insights on recognition of WCU excellence and contributions across our audiences.

**Objectives for Creative Services**

- Develop a cohesive, distinguishing and timeless style and tone through design, video, photography and marketing copy that communicates clearly, is authentic and dynamic, and presents WCU in a unique and compelling way.
- Apply new and creative practices that enhance the department's ability to effectively tell the WCU story to key audiences.

**Objective for Marketing and Special Events**

- Use analytics, user testing, surveys and other data from students, faculty, staff, alumni, and others to:
- Assess the effectiveness of our marketing and messaging efforts
- Gain insights on recognition of WCU excellence and contributions across our audiences
- Build effective digital strategies that increase visibility through search (SEO, SEM) and other means, in coordination with the Web Team in Creative Services.
- Support Advancement & Alumni Affairs in the design and production of fundraising and friendraising events including Alumni Affairs Chancellor Tour, Senior Toast, Scholarship Luncheon, Friends of the Arts Gala, campaign celebrations and many more.
- Support legislative and community efforts by managing WCU hosted events targeting key influencers in our region and legislator
- Increase awareness of WCU's impact on regional & economic development through the design and production of the annual Leadership Tour
- Provide leadership development and oversight to the Chancellor Ambassadors, top-level student group of 18 representing WCU and supporting the Chancellor at events.

## KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

As a department, we will measure and evaluate our efforts through a variety of approaches, including:

- Readership analytics, content consumption, viewership, social media influence, engagement and sentiment assessments.
- Assessment of volume and efficacy of material produced in support of specific priorities outlined in **The WCU 2020 Plan** and the **UCM Strategic Plan**.
- Earned media placement and performance.
- Ongoing market research assessing WCU perceptions associated with the overall strength of the University's reputation and knowledge and recall of priorities associated with **The WCU 2020 Plan**.
- Adoption, knowledge and proficiency among community members in core facets of the WCU brand and visual identity program.