Florida Gulf Coast University – Recommendations on Communications Strategy and Marketing Steps
Outline

> Research recap
> Introduction
> Recommended communications architecture
> Unified brand message
> Staff structure recommendations
> Implementation
Research Recap
Research recap

> The following recommendations are based on research conducted for FGCU between September 2013 and January 2014.

> Comprehensive review of major internal and external audiences
  > current students, faculty, staff, and administration
  > prospective students
  > alumni
  > retired residents of the surrounding 5-county region
  > opinion leaders in Florida’s educational and business communities
Research recap

> Quantitative
  > Online survey of alumni: 288 completed interviews
  > Online survey of current students: 1,217 completed interviews
  > Phone survey of admissions funnel: 602 completed interviews, segmented by 402 inquirers and 200 applicants

> Qualitative
  > In-person meetings with faculty, staff, administrators, and students
  > Focus groups
    - Two (2) groups of FGCU alumni
    - Three (3) groups of seniors and retirees in the 5-county area.
  > Individual interviews with opinion leaders
    - Five (5) individual interviews with leadership in the business community
    - Five (5) individual interviews with leadership in peer educational institutions
Introduction
Introduction

> FGCU was founded in the early 1990s as the tenth campus in the Florida state system with a mission of serving Southwest Florida.

> Since that time it has flourished and grown at an impressive rate.

- It is the fastest growing campus in the United States, with a current student population of more than 14,000.

- It offers 51 undergraduate degree programs and 28 graduate degree programs, many of which have gone through rigorous accreditation processes with impressive speed and efficiency.

- Its athletics success story is amazing – not just the nationally publicized success of its 2013 men’s basketball squad, but the performances of many other equally impressive men’s and women’s sports. In sports, FGCU plays above its weight.
Introduction

The FGCU campus, with its many attractive buildings and green spaces set out in a pleasing arrangement, surprises with its beauty and coherence.

In 2013, FGCU’s success was acknowledged by the State University System’s Performance Based Funding Initiative, based on the University’s

- percent of bachelor’s graduates employed and/or continuing their education one year after graduation
- median average full-time wages of undergraduates employed in Florida one year after graduation
- average cost per undergraduate degree to the institution
Introduction

> For all its success, FGCU has not developed, along with its successful programs, good tools for making its various audiences aware of its accomplishments.

> On the internal front,

  • Current staff and faculty say that they do not feel informed about news and developments across the campus.

  • Current students are unaware of the range of its programs and offerings at FGCU beyond their own program.

> Better internal communication would not only lead to greater institutional pride and more effective funneling of students into FGCU’s programs, it would also contribute to better external awareness, since the staff, faculty, and students are potential ambassadors to external communities.
Introduction

> One cause of FGCU’s deficiency in getting the word out is the rapid growth of the institution and the understandable emphasis on program development not marketing and communications.

> FGCU’s administrative structures in communications have not matured to keep up with its program development.
Introduction

> Picture FGCU as a collection of student and faculty accomplishments and community and professional engagements distributed among various colleges within the University.

> Information flows in haphazard ways. Sometimes individuals in one corner of the University are aware of accomplishments in another corner, but more often they are not.
Introduction

> The goal for marketing communications should be to create structures, practices, and pipelines so that news about the University can be effectively collected and disseminated.
FGCU

Health Professions & Social Work

Education

Business

Arts & Sciences

Engineering

Community Engagement

Student Stories

Faculty Accomplishments
Introduction

> When the information is collected, it can then be funneled to external audiences:

- prospective students and their influencers
- prospective faculty and staff
- current and prospective donors
- alumni
- employers
- local civic associations and businesses
- peer institutions
- regional and state legislators
- local, regional, and national press
Introduction

> and to internal audiences
  - students
  - staff
  - faculty
Prospective faculty

Current and prospective donors

Alumni

Prospective students and influencers

Employers

Local, regional, and national press

State legislators

Faculty

Staff

Local civic associations and businesses

Peer institutions
Recommended Communications Architecture
Recommended communications architecture

- This section lays out the architecture that FGCU communications professionals should use to structure marketing efforts at the University.

- An architecture based on audience priorities will make the FGCU story more easily graspable.

- It is not sufficient to share particular accomplishments and brags. It is better to fit particular accomplishments into a coherent narrative that makes sense. This will more rapidly build positive awareness of the University.
Recommended communications architecture

> One FGCU staff member with whom we spoke said this:

- We’re so young, we’re like a new child. We’ve mainly been focused on our growth. Now we’re 16, so we’re an adolescent, and we’re wondering what we will be when we grow up. We have that awkwardness of an adolescent.
Recommended communications architecture

> The communications architecture plainly states what FGCU will be as a “grown-up.”

> It will be a University with all the initiatives, life aspirations, audiences, and ambitions that one finds at a thriving university.

> As a university, FGCU and its activities cannot possibly be summed up in a single, neat tagline. It supports many intentions and activities. For example, it features both fully-accredited academic programs and top athletics programs.

> The communications architecture fleshes out FGCU's chief components as a university, then builds a communications strategy around them.
Recommended communications architecture

> The communications architecture focuses communications on three themes, each directed primarily at different audiences:

- A place where student success is the first priority
- A producer of new knowledge with Southwest Florida as a laboratory
- A cultural, educational, and entertainment resource to the region
Recommended communications architecture

> “A place where student success is the first priority” is primarily directed at:

- Prospective undergraduate and graduate students
- Admissions influencers (parents, guidance counselors, peers)
- Current students
- Regional civic advocates
- Prospective employers
Recommended communications architecture

> Note that this narrative is not particularly distinguishing. Many institutions can claim student success.

> It does not need to be so distinguishing because admissions demand is strong and because the “family relationship” with other Florida University campuses is an asset.

> Nonetheless, it is an important narrative that should be supported with proof-points and solid accomplishments.

> The narrative should be structured around what research revealed to be the priorities of prospective and current students.
Recommended communications architecture

Percent very impt/impt factor in choosing schools among prospective and current students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Prospective students</th>
<th>Current students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of teaching</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A specific program or major</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job placement after graduation</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic support</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordability</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security and personal safety</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of programs and majors</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation of program</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of need-based aid</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship opportunities</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal attention from faculty and staff</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A social environment that I fit into</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence halls and campus facilities</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A culture of learning that I fit into</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommended communications architecture

> For prospective students the most important elements in the narrative are:
  - Quality of teaching
  - Strength of specific programs and majors
  - Job placement after graduation
  - Academic support services
  - Affordability
  - Security and personal safety
  - Range of programs and majors

> Admissions marketing – from the viewbook to the campus tour – should be built around these elements.

> Note that the social environment, while important, is not as important as these more academically-oriented themes.
The theme “a place where student success is the first priority” is directed at current students as well as prospective students, since student retention is an important issue.
Research indicates that current student satisfaction is good but there is room for improvement.

Likelihood to recommend FGCU among current students

Question: How likely are you to recommend FGCU to a close friend or family? [Scale of 0 to 10, 0 for “Very unlikely” and 10 for “Very likely”]

Net Promoter Score: +49

- Promoters (61%)
- Passives (27%)
- Detractors (12%)

0 - Not at all Likely
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 - Very Likely
Research indicates FGCU could score higher among current students in the following important areas:

- teaching quality
- affordability
- range of programs and majors
- job placement
Importance vs. FGCU performance among current students

- **High Importance**
  - Teaching quality
  - Range of prog./major
  - Affordability

- **High Rating**
  - Location
  - Accreditation
  - Specific program/major
  - Security/safety

- **Strengths**
  - Academic support
  - Personal attention
  - Flexibility

- **Low Importance**
  - Diversity
  - Athletics
  - Online classes
  - Evenings/weekend classes

- **Low Leverage Issues**
  - Service learning
  - Dorms/campus facilities
  - Student body size

- **Low Priority Issues**
  - Class size
  - Service learning
  - Dorms/campus facilities
  - Student body size
Recommended communications architecture

> Some of these issues involve communications. Current students may not know about the range of programs and majors or FGCU’s track record with employment. FGCU can focus on improving communications in these areas.

> Also, admissions and student life marketing should emphasize a culture of dedicated, intentional students.
Recommended communications architecture

> “A producer of new knowledge with Southwest Florida as a laboratory” is primarily directed at:

- Regional and national press
- Regional stakeholders
- State politicians
- Current and prospective donors
- Prospective faculty
- Alumni
This is the narrative that distinguishes FGCU from competing institutions. It is differentiated from Edison State College through the emphasis on research, and from other universities in the Florida system through the emphasis on Southwest Florida.

It is the most impressive and newsworthy narrative beyond FGCU’s immediate geographic area.

The narrative draws on widely held positive feeling about Southwest Florida, and builds a narrative that makes Southwest Florida a fascinating laboratory for new environmental, business, development, healthcare, and educational initiatives.

FGCU owns this narrative.
Recommended communications architecture

> Execution of this narrative involves collecting faculty initiatives across the University that connect to the region and telling these stories in ways that elaborate the challenges and dynamism of the region.

> Examples:

- Watershed and marine biology research that focuses on the Gulf of Mexico in the College of Arts and Sciences.
- Educational programs directed at the great cultural and economic diversity of Collier County in the College of Education.
- Engineering initiatives that focus on smart growth for a rapidly developing region, sustainability, renewable energy, and adaptive aging in the College of Engineering.
- Business initiatives around development such as the Regional Economic Research Institute in the Lutgert College of Business.
- Health initiatives around an aging population in the College of Health Professions and Social Work.
Recommended communications architecture

> The third narrative, “a cultural, educational, and entertainment resource to the region,” targets:

- FGCU alumni, most of whom live locally
- Current and prospective donors
- Local retirees
- Area businesses and civic associations
- Regional and state politicians
- Prospective faculty and staff
This narrative is somewhat appealing to prospective undergraduates, but it is not a primary driver, so it should be distinguished from narrative #2 and deployed in the appropriate settings to the appropriate audiences.
Recommended communications architecture

Strength of thematics
(Prospective students)

College Z provides a more personal undergraduate education, with smaller classes and faculty who take the time to get to know their students. Students receive personal attention like a private school at public school prices.

College X’s curriculum is fresh and unburdened by older approaches to education. It allows students to major in traditional academic disciplines along with cutting-edge professional programs, and prepares students to tackle real world problems.

College X is interdisciplinary and offers a wide range of programs. It allows students to major in traditional academic disciplines along with cutting-edge professional programs, and prepares students to tackle real world problems.

College W is leading southwest Florida’s academic and cultural growth, through lectures, concerts, art exhibits, and top-ranked athletics. Learning in the classroom imparts students with real-life skills and knowledge, and extends its impact through partnerships with the community.

College Y provides a roadmap to studying and living sustainably, through spearheading Florida’s scholarly advances in coastal studies and developing a campus infrastructure that is compatible with its wetland environment.
Recommended communications architecture

> This narrative should include all the athletic, educational, artistic, community service, and cultural resources that FGCU provides.

> Like narrative #2, it distinguishes FGCU since no other institution in the region can fill this role in the same way.
> Alumni, many of whom live locally, respond positively to the theme that FGCU is “leading Southwest Florida’s growth,” although their most important priority is personalized education.
Recommended communications architecture

Descriptiveness of thematics

- Personal undergraduate education
  - Describes very well (5): 53%
  - Describes well (4): 33%
  - Describes poorly (1): 11%

- Roadmap to studying & living sustainably
  - Describes very well (5): 37%
  - Describes well (4): 38%
  - Describes poorly (1): 17%

- Interdisciplinary/wide range of programs
  - Describes very well (5): 35%
  - Describes well (4): 45%
  - Describes poorly (1): 13%

- Leading SW Florida’s growth
  - Describes very well (5): 35%
  - Describes well (4): 43%
  - Describes poorly (1): 16%

- Curriculum is fresh and unburdened
  - Describes very well (5): 27%
  - Describes well (4): 40%
  - Describes poorly (1): 24%
Recommended communications architecture

In deploying the theme, it is important to include the full range of events and activities:

- art exhibitions
- musical performances
- theater
- public television and radio
- athletics
- continuing education, The Renaissance Academy
- guest lectures
- community engagements through service learning
Unified Brand Message
Unified brand message

> The following narrative ties together the three sub-strands into a single story:
“What is FGCU? It is a vibrant university in Southwest Florida. Like any university, you can’t reduce its many stories to a short tagline. If you ask me to sum it up, I would point to three things:

• “First, we offer highly effective undergraduate and graduate programs across a full range of disciplines. Student success results from a combination of small class size, high quality programs with tangible outcomes, committed students, and faculty that make teaching their top priority.”

• “Second, our professors and our students use our dynamic, rapidly growing region as a laboratory. From marine biology and environmental sustainability to smart growth, entrepreneurship, health care for the aging, and education, FGCU is fascinated by the challenges of, and helps define, Southwest Florida.”
Unified brand message

- “Third, we are a unique cultural and entertainment resource for our region. Our sports programs play above their weight in so many sports. Our art gallery, theater, public television and radio, and musical performances enrich the region’s cultural life. And our continuing education programs provide lifelong learning opportunities for the area.”
Unified brand message

The entire unified brand message would be used in select settings; for example, the President speaking to the national press or on the homepage of the University website.

Most often, communications would be tailored to a particular audience.

When focusing on a particular audience, such as retirees in surrounding communities, prospective students, or prospective faculty, priority would be given to the message tailored to their interests. The other messages would be subordinated.

One might have as a general rule of thumb a 60-20-20 rule: 60% of messaging should employ the theme most directly pertinent to a particular audience. Twenty percent could be allocated to each of the other themes.
Unified brand message

> The following chart diagrams the messages and the architecture.
Narrative #1
FGCU is a university where student success is the first priority.

Narrative #2
FGCU facilitates the production of new knowledge with Southwest Florida as a laboratory.

Narrative #3
FGCU is a cultural, educational, and entertainment resource to the region.
FGCU: A vibrant University in Southwest Florida

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FGCU: A vibrant University in Southwest Florida

**Narrative #1**
FGCU is a university where student success is the first priority.

**Narrative #2**
FGCU facilitates the production of new knowledge with Southwest Florida as a laboratory.

**Narrative #3**
FGCU is a cultural, educational, and entertainment resource to the region.

### Talking Points

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Student success is the first priority

Narrative #2
Creation of new knowledge

Narrative #3
Cultural, educational, entertainment resource
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Student success is the first priority

Narrative #2
Creation of new knowledge

Narrative #3
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**Narrative #1**  
Student success is the first priority

**Talking Points**

1. Quality of teaching  
2. Program strength  
3. Job placement  
4. Academic support  
5. Affordability  
6. Personal safety  
7. Range of programs and majors

**Audiences**

- Prospective undergraduate and graduate students  
- Admissions influencers (parents, guidance counselors, peers)  
- Current students  
- Regional civic boosters

**Narrative #2**  
Creation of new knowledge

**Talking Points**

- Marine science  
- Entrepreneurship  
- Sustainability  
- Responsible development  
- Bio-technology  
- Adaptive aging  
- Educating a diverse population

**Audiences**

- Regional and national press  
- Regional stakeholders  
- State politicians  
- Major fundraising prospects  
- Prospective faculty  
- Alumni

**Narrative #3**  
Cultural, educational, entertainment resource

**Talking Points**

- Art exhibitions  
- Musical performances  
- Theater  
- Public television and radio  
- Athletics  
- Continuing education  
- Guest lectures  
- Community engagements through service learning

**Audiences**

- FGCU alumni  
- Fundraising prospects  
- Local retirees  
- Regional politicians  
- Area businesses and civic associations  
- Prospective faculty
Staff structure recommendations
Currently, communications functions at FGCU are dispersed among several units – public relations, web communications, advancement communications, and admissions communications all operate separately.

This makes it difficult to share resources or deploy staff strategically across the institution.

There is no unit with responsibility for overseeing institution-wide marketing strategy or to ensure that communications activities contribute to overall institutional goals.
Examples of communications collaborations and cross-fertilizations that the current structure makes difficult are:

- use of Pinnacle content on the Web or in public relations
- use of photography, video, text, or designs developed in admissions, advancement or Web communications in other units
- coordination of the Web with social media strategy
- coordination of Web and print admissions strategy
- coordination of Web and print advancement strategy
- using the Web as part of public relations strategy
- coordination of media buying
- coordination of photo or video resources across units
- Web access to professional writers
- coordination of market research with execution in admissions, advancement, or the Web
Staff structure recommendations

> The current structure does not include a head of institutional marketing who can think strategically about the ways in which individual communications contribute to building the FGCU brand and who can prioritize communications initiatives based on a big-picture understanding of resources and goals.
Staff structure recommendations

> FGCU should centralize marketing in a new office for marketing and communications.

> The office should be built from the current staffs of:
  - advancement communications
  - web and publications services
  - admissions communications

> A new public relations function will need to be added (since the media relations and official spokesperson function is going to remain in the President’s Office)

> Other communications operations, such as those in Housing and Residential Life and Athletics, should remain as is, but be better coordinated with this office through regular meetings and consultation.
Staff structure recommendations

> These are the functions centralized in a new office of marketing and communications:

**FGCU office for marketing and communications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public relations</th>
<th>Print design</th>
<th>Print production</th>
<th>Web design + production</th>
<th>Content generation (text)</th>
<th>Content generation (photography + video)</th>
<th>Photo + video archiving and storage</th>
<th>Social media marketing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Implementation
Implementation

> Given budgets, time-frames and expectations, FGCU staff do a good job on communications.

> It is unnecessary to envision a wholesale re-engineering of the many communications projects conducted at FGCU or any changes to the graphic standards system.
Implementation

> We recommend four projects to build awareness of FGCU and get its story out:

1. Organizational realignment
2. Website
3. Theme #2 public relations plan
4. On-line staff and faculty newsletter

> If executed well, these four projects can significantly enhance public awareness of FGCU and advance it toward its admissions, fundraising, community and alumni engagement, and public awareness goals.
Implementation

> Organizational realignment

- Create an office for marketing and communications with the consolidation of functions and staff laid out in the previous section.
- In so doing, one will need to resolve the relationship of this unit to the external affairs function and e-learning.
Implementation

> Website

- We do not recommend a wholesale redesign and re-architecturing of the website. That project would be costly and time-consuming. It would take between 18 months and two years to complete.

- We recommend a more surgical approach:
  1. Design and produce content (both visual and textual) for a new homepage with feature areas supporting the three themes in the message architecture.
  2. Design and produce content (both visual and textual) for new landing pages or micro-sites for admissions, news and affairs, campus programs and events, and advancement and a virtual tour.
  3. The admissions microsite should have newly authored, reader-friendly information on FGCU programs and majors.
Implementation

> An example of such an admissions microsite is that of Tufts University undergraduate admissions:

- [http://admissions.tufts.edu/](http://admissions.tufts.edu/)
Implementations

> Website

- Engage external firm to design, architect, and produce content for these pages and sites.
- Employ FGCU staff to tie the pages into the FGCU content management system (RedDot).
- In the course of producing the new pages and micro-sites, have the external team produce a series of improved templates that FGCU web staff will install over the remainder of the existing site as possible.
- This project should take approximately six to eight months to complete.
Implementation

> Theme #2 public relations plan

- FGCU staff or an external consultant identify approximately 12 to 18 stories based on theme #2.
- FGCU staff produce content for the stories (both visual and textual) and load them on a dedicated area of the newly designed FGCU homepage.
- FGCU staff plan and implement a social media marketing campaign to build awareness of the stories.
- FGCU staff use media contacts to build interest in the stories.
On-line staff and faculty newsletter

- Employ external consultant to develop a design for a bi-weekly staff and faculty newsletter that can be distributed electronically across the campus.

- Topics include:
  - faculty and staff accomplishments
  - student accomplishments
  - university news
  - community initiatives
  - coming events of interest to faculty and staff
  - classified advertisements
Neustadt Creative Marketing

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www.ncmark.com
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