

Core Commitments Project Launch Meeting: Communications and Advocacy



Why Do Strategic Communications? Not Just Fame and Fortune

- ✓ Building institutional ethos and identity depends on shared values and understandings
- ✓ Changes in campus culture depend on shared commitment and understanding
- ✓ Powerful and informed advocates are essential to long-term success
- ✓ Successful communications creates informed newcomers—student, their parents, new faculty, new staff
- ✓ Shared understanding sets better context for crisis management
- ✓ Clear public identity improves fundraising and recruitment



Strategic Communications: More Than Just Media Outreach

- ✓ Most important audience—internal to campus:
 - ✓ Students, Faculty, Administrators
 - ✓ Student Affairs and Other Staff

Other important audiences:

Local Media/Local Community

Alumni

Trustees and Regents

Legislators



Framing Effective Messages

- ◆ Short, concise, memorable
- ◆ Relevant to audience
- ◆ 7x7=0
- ◆ 3x3=2
- ◆ Know your audience
- ◆ Use them!!! You can't repeat them too much



Spokespeople

- ◆ Everyone is a potential spokesperson
- ◆ In the internet age, any comment or posting--accurate or inaccurate--can be communicated, can spread quickly, and can influence your key audiences
- ◆ Prepare official spokespersons with carefully crafted messages
- ◆ Ultimate success will depend on quality of project outcomes and actual activities
- ◆ The more strategic communications you do, the more people on campus will become informed spokespersons



Student Focus Groups

- ✓ Peter D. Hart Research conducted 8 focus groups for AAC&U—6 between July 26 and August 3, 2004, and 2 in March 2005 among:
 - ✓ Rising public high school seniors who plan to attend a four-year college or university
 - ✓ Rising juniors and seniors at public and private colleges and universities
 - ✓ The groups were held in four locations:
 - ✓ Indianapolis, Indiana
 - ✓ Portland, Oregon
 - ✓ Alexandria, Virginia
 - ✓ Milwaukee, WI
- ✓ The discussions focused on personal aspirations relating to college and not on outcomes of college as they relate to society as a whole.



Feelings About College

- ◆ Both audiences express positive feelings about college associated with independence, freedom, increased responsibility, new experiences, and academic and social opportunities.
- ◆ For some high-school students, the transition to college engenders strong feelings of anxiety about having freedom and independence, and anxiety about career path.
 - “It’s daunting to have to decide right now what I’m going to have to do with the rest of my life . . . where I’m going to go to school, what I’m going to study, who I involve myself with. It is all encompassing about how I’m shaping my future, what I’m going to do with my life, how I’m going to make money for the rest of my life. It’s just daunting.”
High school student, Indianapolis, IN
- ◆ College students identify the college environment as promoting flexibility and broad exposure in pursuit of their interests.



Preparation For College

- ◆ High-school students feel uninformed about the college curriculum and uncertain about its demands.
- ◆ However, they are not overly concerned about preparation and are not actively searching for answers.
 - “I think that college is expecting you to not know what’s going on. The whole freshman class, it’s going to be a first for them. I’m not really concerned that I’m going to get behind once I get into college. Everyone is going to be in the same situation. I’m sure they . . . expect you to have problems.”
--College student, Alexandria, VA
- ◆ High school and college students express the view that it is up to the individual to succeed or fail in college.



Sources Of College Information

- ◆ Limited resources are available on how to prepare for college life academically and socially.
- ◆ Most valued sources for honest answers and relevant information are those with recent experience:
 - Siblings
 - Friends
 - Recent graduates
- ◆ Less valued sources include:
 - Parents
 - College counselors
 - Teachers
 - Colleges and universities



Outcomes Of College For High School And College Students

Most Important Outcomes

- ✓ Maturity and ability to succeed on one's own
- ✓ Time-management skills
- ✓ Strong work habits
- ✓ Self-discipline
- ✓ Teamwork skills and ability to get along with different types of people

Challenge: students don't readily link these outcomes to the college curriculum



Outcomes Of College For High School And College Students

Middle Tier Outcomes

- ✓ Tangible business skills and specific expertise in field of focus
- ✓ Critical thinking skills
- ✓ Communication skills
- ✓ Problem-solving skills and analytical ability
- ✓ Exposure to business world
- ✓ Leadership skills



Outcomes Of College For High School And College Students

Least Important Outcomes

- ✓ Values, principles, ethics
- ✓ Tolerance and respect for different cultural backgrounds
- ✓ Competency in computer skills
- ✓ Expanded cultural and global awareness and sensitivity
- ✓ Civic responsibility and orientation toward public service



How To Get Messages Out: Communications Strategies

- ◆ Project Events
- ◆ Project Publications
- ◆ Project Research Findings
- ◆ Project Web site
- ◆ Interviews
- ◆ Earned and unearned/paid and unpaid media

Note: Repeat same core messages in all outlets



Media Outreach

- ◆ Not just news releases
- ◆ Hard news and soft news/features
- ◆ Opinion/Letters to Editor
- ◆ Radio/TV public interest
- ◆ Don't forget on-campus outlets—student paper, alumni publications



Media Outreach

- ◆ Control the message; choose when to engage
- ◆ Make your own opportunities
- ◆ Take advantage of unexpected opportunities
- ◆ Prepare for crises—key spokespeople, clear line of communication to leaders, get the facts out yourself and quickly

