

## **Communication Concept Paper**

### **Higher Education Trends**

“Information” is the lifeblood of higher education institutions. A university’s “information” and the means in which it is communicated is as important as the university’s finances and human capital. Accordingly, improving and enhancing communication is a common theme in university strategic plans. Even those universities that already communicate efficiently and effectively recognize that it can always be done better. Universities seeking to improve and enhance communication consider the similar and dissimilar requirements of communicating to internal and external constituencies.

Universities nationwide face an ever-increasing accountability demand. Universities generally develop a communication plan that involves on-going monitoring of its internal and external environments so that it can recognize and align to even slight changes in its stakeholders’ desires, expectations, and demands. These plans efficiently and effectively mobilize university faculty and staff so that they are able to focus their energies on new challenges and changes in strategic direction.

The purpose of communication varies depending on whether the aim is to address an audience of higher education specialists, disseminate information to the media in an attempt to reach a wide audience, engage in dialogue with the potential employers of students, or communicate changes in policy or procedures to current employees. Purposes must be defined, formulated, and shared and different approaches and skills will be required to adapt the message closely to the target audiences. This is even more important since all players are permanently exposed to a broad range of influences. A university often plans and thinks about the long term, but the changes that affect it often have major impacts that require flexibility and the ability to react rapidly, appropriately, and effectively. As such, a university’s “message” must be reviewed and refined on an almost daily basis. A university can never stop demonstrating its worth and excellence. Accordingly, it must continuously communicate in a way that enhances and promotes its image.

Universities view the improvement of employee performance as an important aspect of internal communication. An efficient internal communication process contributes to an organization’s success. Personnel promote the image of the university they represent, so, in large part, universities view internal constituents as the most important university stakeholder. External stakeholders include potential students and their families, the local community, society, the government, other higher education institutions, local authorities, future employees, and accrediting agencies. Communication to external constituencies involves the shaping and telling of the institution’s “story” to influence stakeholders to, for example, support the university through donations or legislative support or enroll as students. Again, it is important to note, that a university’s internal stakeholders are the most effective in communicating this “story.”

## **Background of PR Plan and Recruitment Plan**

For the past few years, external communication from USD has been focused mostly on student recruitment-based communication strategies. The larger focus, in terms of resources and priority messaging, was geared towards prospective students and the university's recruitment efforts. One major area that has been identified for improvement is the current perception external stakeholders have of USD. This includes communicating USD's strengths to external stakeholders, so that our value in the state and region is fully recognized. We have begun to communicate our leadership and impact throughout the state.

We have identified a need for improvement of consistent, transparent internal communication. We are looking to create a more centralized and formalized process of internal communication. One area that has already begun is the onboarding process through Human Resources. The overall internal and external communication approach has been revisited and is in the process of being restructured.

The new approach has a much larger emphasis on:

- Building a communication strategy with tactics that optimize available budgets and resources to deliver the best Key Performance Indicators for all constituency groups;
- Creating balanced messaging with a larger focus on University reputation;
- Establishing brand identity and mission for both internal and external audiences; and
- Formalizing a cross-campus communication process to ensure consistent university branding and messaging

## **Strategic Themes**

Strategic themes were identified taking into consideration the constant movement that the Marketing and Communications team is making. A clear mission, vision, values statement and articulation of the institutional history is necessary to develop a strong foundation for all communication. By developing a strong foundation for communication, our institutional identity will be strong and the messaging that surrounds it will be powerful and appropriate to the culture of the institution. The thoughtful communication of our commitment to stakeholders and our institutional goals will also support our story and identity development.

## **External Stakeholders Perception of USD**

- No recognition of USD outside of South Dakota

- We have the Medical School and Law school in the state
- Perception is improving with the new presidency
- Poor communication
- Lack of identity
- Need for a more collaborative relationship with Vermillion

### **Our Commitment**

- Accessible, transparent, and timely communication in processes and procedures
- Clear and defined expectations and goals

### **Our Goals**

- Instill Pride
- Enhance Prestige
- Improve Service

### **Short and Long Term Plans**

Our short term plan must take into consideration the strategic themes and higher education trends with a timeline of implementation. We consider a short term plan to be 12-18 months.

### **Tell Our Story**

- Mission
- Vision
- Values
- History

### **Process**

- Communicate our story to key external stakeholders.
- Highlight our current faculty and staff and make their accomplishments known.
- Identify key students to share our message
- Create outreach programs in the high schools

- Improved alignment with members of Sioux Falls, Rapid City, and Yankton campuses
- Improve onboarding for new employees
- Communicate how we build the state and how we serve the state by telling stories and using imagery
- Write our 150 year history that led us to what we are now
- Better alignment with the community as they embrace USD and the new culture

### Funding

- Make sure communication is funded and staffed
- Funds for outreach to engage students
- Funds required to align USD and Vermillion businesses and interests in a mutually beneficial manner