Marketing & Communications

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7. Summary of Assessment Results with Focus on Program Improvement: Describe evidence-based changes that have taken place within the last few assessment cycles because of assessment. Statements must be supported by evidence from the assessment report(s).

Recruitment: To Enhance University Brand Among Prospective Families

OUTCOME: Marketing and Communications (MarComm) will develop and refine a print and digital marketing campaign by fall 2017 to enhance the College’s image and reputation among prospective students (traditional, nontraditional, transfer, graduate and international) and parents to increase the enrollment of a more diverse and higher quality student population.

Diversity, as it pertains to recruitment, is defined by the MarComm division as attracting students from different cultural, socioeconomic, ethnic, racial and other diverse backgrounds.

Measure 1.1: Implement and continue to refine a multimedia recruitment strategy in fall 2017 to increase applicants by selecting content that appeals to various demographics (in-state, out-of-state, diversity) and increase the number of communications and engagements through various communications channels.

Target: In-state focus: To increase the number of in-state applications from FY17 (5,822) in order to yield 1,100 resident students in the traditional freshman class (spring 2018).

Strategies: Generating audience-specific content of interest (messaging, video content) and distributing through direct email campaigns to various targeted audiences. The college marketing team will also explore two new strategies: 1. A multimedia marketing strategy directed at gamers and gaming channels (i.e., video game players); 2. Use of 360-degree video content to immerse prospective students in a classroom, field trip and/or campus setting.

Results: The Division of Marketing and Communications developed and implemented a multimedia recruitment strategy beginning in spring 2017 to increase applicants by selecting content that appealed to various demographics (in-state, out-of-state, diversity). At the time of reporting (June 2018), our in-state yield was 1,258. This exceeded our target.

The early results of the email campaign were excellent. As of January 2018 (which represents the lion’s share of prospective communication), half of MarComm’s emails exceeded the national average for open rates (22%). For example, the open rate for senior prospects was 22.9 and our non-senior prospects was 27.91%. More than 80% of our emails exceeded the national average for click-through at 2.63%. Our average click-through rate for senior prospects was 6.89%, our senior suspect rate was 3.44% and the national average was 2.63%. For non-seniors, the numbers were even better: 9.08% for non-senior prospects, 4.28% for suspects and the national average was 2.63%. These numbers were generated by TargetX reports, which allowed the college marketing team to see which messages/emails resonated with prospective students and their families.

Methodology: The Division of Marketing and Communications used reports generated by the Office of Admissions regarding deposits of accepted students (which determines the incoming class).

Action Items from FY18: We’ll continue to closely align to the goals of the Office of Admissions and the College and have learned that the most important measure is actionable applications and then, from that, yield – both for meeting target numbers and to improve our selectivity.

Measure 1.2: Implement and continue to refine an annual media/advertising plan targeting prospective nonresident students and their families by summer 2017.

Target: Out-of-state focus: To increase the number of out-of-state applications from FY17 (7,037) in order to yield 900 non-resident students (spring 2018).

Strategies: Making advertising buys that maximize reach and appeal for admissions’ target audience. Directing audience to specific pages with College of Charleston content, with redesigned web pages (landing pages) and new content.

Results: The Division of Marketing and Communications implemented an annual media/advertising plan targeting nonresident prospective students and their families starting in June 2017. At the time of reporting (June 2018), our out-of-state yield was 1,051. This exceeded our target.

Methodology: The Division of Marketing and Communications used reports generated by the Office of Admissions regarding deposits of accepted students (which determines the incoming class).

Action Item for Measure 1.2: In reviewing our targets and results, the college marketing team determined that target 1.2 was misaligned and was more appropriate as a (b) target for 1.1 since the media/advertising plan is broader in scope and can be broken down as resident and nonresident marketing strategies. Therefore, target 1.2 for FY19 will be to align media buys with admissions’ target audience and geographic locations.
Engagement: Support Advancement and Fundraising

OUTCOME: The Division of Marketing and Communications (MarComm) will assess engagement with its community through fundraising initiatives and interaction through the College's social media channels.

Community, as defined by MarComm, is the greater College of Charleston family: faculty, staff, students, alumni, friends and state legislators.

Engagement, as defined by MarComm for this outcome, relates to interaction with the College's official social media channels (likes, followers, comments, impressions) as well as philanthropic participation in current and future fundraising initiatives.

Measure 2.1: Implement a multimedia communications strategy and marketing strategy to assist the Office of Development in reaching its CofC Fund philanthropic goals by June 2018.

Target: Support the Development Office in their goal to reach $975,000 through an integrated marketing campaign. (FY18)

Strategies: Print materials to alumni with call to action (CofC Magazine, Momentum, Donor Report, direct mail), social media messaging and alumni-centric event messaging

Results: The Division of Marketing and Communications implemented a multimedia communications strategy to assist the Office of Development. The FY18 Annual Giving goal was $2,250,000 and they exceeded that goal at $2,600,000 raised. The FY18 Parents Fund goal was $950,000 and they also exceeded their goal at $1,109,000 raised.

Methodology: The Division of Institutional Advancement ran a report of total giving for each of the aforementioned areas.

Action Items: In reviewing the partnership between the development team and MarComm team, the advancement communications team has determined that while sharing a financial goal with development is important, it is mainly out of the control of MarComm since they are not frontline development professionals (i.e., development officers, major gifts officers, Cougar Calling Center employees). Therefore, the MarComm team needs to measure the impact of its work within parameters that it controls. The advancement communications team will begin tracking pageviews on The College Today for its philanthropy stories to establish a target baseline regarding readership. The advancement communications team will also hold follow-up meetings after each philanthropy campaign to determine success or failure in order to establish strategies for improvement. In past years, this type of post-mortem has been haphazard at best. The advancement communications team will also expand its work and create an ad campaign promoting events/activities for the Charleston community to establish a target baseline regarding community engagement. The advancement communications team believes that increased visibility of campus activities among the community will help seed engagement efforts by our development teams.

Measurement 2.2: Increase audience reach on the College’s social media channels by creating captivating content that appeals to CofC community.

Target: Increase total number of “connections” by 8 percent (or 14,692) – specifically, aggregate likes on Facebook and followers on Twitter, SnapChat, Instagram and LinkedIn – as compared to FY17 (in May 2017, the College’s total social media reach was 183,654). (FY17)

Strategies: Produce and share more video content, more posts showing the “personality” of the university through The College Today, CofC Magazine and other story selection.

Results: The Division of Marketing and Communications worked to increase its audience reach through the College’s social media channels by creating captivating content that appeals to CofC community. As of June 19, 2018, the College’s total social media reach was 202,064, representing a 10.2 percent increase over the audience total from May 2017. The target was met and exceeded, despite Facebook and Twitter having purged thousands of fake accounts.

Methodology: The Division of Marketing and Communications counted social media reach through those channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and SnapChat).

Action Items: As stated in previous reports, the College’s digital presence is only growing, both in size and importance, regarding brand recognition and communication. The communications team, in partnership with the division and campus social media contacts, will continue to work to increase the total number of “connections” by 5 percent (specifically likes on Facebook and followers on Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn) as compared to FY18. The communications team will also measure total “impressions” across all social media platforms in FY19 to establish a baseline for future targets. The communications team will purchase a more robust media monitoring and social media tracking system in order to help track these numbers.

Visibility: Extend and Enhance the College’s Brand and Reputation

OUTCOME: The Division of Marketing and Communications will enhance the national reputation and brand of the College of Charleston and educate external audiences to the quality and value of a liberal arts and science education through multiple media channels.

External audiences, as defined by MarComm, are made up of prospective students and their families, community members, state legislators, alumni and friends of the College.

Measure 3.1: Implement annual media plan to increase visibility among local, statewide and national target audiences (i.e., prospective families, business community and alumni).

Target: Make 15 unique pitches per month or more to media outlets (FY18) – this is an increase as compared to the FY17 goal of 10 unique pitches per month.
Strategies: Drive more content from division-wide efforts (The College Today, CofC Magazine, Momentum, etc.) as well as general campus news and engage more journalists with pitch ideas regarding the College's students, faculty and academic programming.

Results: The Division of Marketing and Communications implemented a media pitch plan to increase visibility among local, statewide and national target audiences (i.e. prospective families, business community and alumni). The media relations averaged 20.5 unique media pitches per month.

Methodology: The Division of Marketing and Communications recorded the number of pitches and outlets pitched throughout the year, which was reported monthly to the division head.

Action Item: The communications team exceeded its pitch goal for FY18. However, on reflection of this goal, the communications team members determined that the number of pitches does not necessarily reflect an increase in visibility for the College. Therefore, the communications team is going to focus on new placements (meaning developing relationships with journalists/editors at media outlets in which we have previously not been covered). While we will continue to track media pitches, we need to expand the presence of the College in more media outlets.

Measurement 3.2: Increase the average monthly audience of The College Today, the College's main news hub, as compared to FY16 by improving search engine optimization, improving site navigation, design and functionality and adopting best practices for content marketing.

Target: Increase the average monthly page views by 10 percent (or 2,756 total page views) for The College Today as compared to the FY17 target of 27,562. This would make a monthly average of 30,318.

Strategies: Provide more timely content, increase use of social media channels to share College Today content, weave College of Charleston Magazine content into the College Today platform and improve search engine optimization, site navigation, design and functionality. In order to continue to elevate the quality and quantity of the content of The College Today, the division’s web marketing team will integrate CofC Magazine into the main news hub. The division will also refocus some staff time to create a rotating schedule for videographers and photographers to assist the editorial team.

Results: The Division of Marketing and Communications implemented a strategy to increase the average monthly audience of The College Today, the institution's main news hub. The monthly average page views on The College Today from July 1, 2017, through June 18, 2018, was 61,529. The target was met and exceeded.

Methodology: The Division of Marketing and Communications used Google analytics to track the number of pages views between July 2017 and June 2018.

As stated in previous years' reports, The College Today continues to grow in importance and relevance to the division's function in recruitment, visibility and engagement. The division will continue to add staffing resources from different division teams (specifically, photography and videography services) to raise the level of content and increase the number of stories being produced.

Action Items: The division will continue to allocate the necessary resources to support this vital communications function – editorial, photography and videography. In FY19, we have allocated resources specifically to support a part-time photographer dedicated to The College Today team.