

# Integrated Marketing Communications Strategy



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# Introduction

Winston-Salem State University's mission is to provide its students with innovative undergraduate programs and exceptional graduate programs grounded in the tradition of liberal education. Its students engage in active and experiential learning offered through flexible delivery modes. The university is dedicated to the holistic development of students by faculty dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, and service. The Office of Integrated Marketing Communication holds responsibility for communicating this mission to the university's various stakeholders. This is achieved through this Integrated Marketing Communications Plan, which outlines the target audiences for communications, defines the key messaging, sets the goals, and establishes the tactics that will be taken to achieve those goals.

# Purpose

The purpose of the Integrated Marketing Communications strategy is to increase the overall visibility of the university and to enhance its reputation among both internal and external audiences. According to the American Marketing Association, integrated marketing communications is "a planning process designed to assure that all brand contacts received by a customer or prospect for a product, service, or organization are relevant to that person and consistent over time." This approach will be applied to develop marketing and communications strategies that are comprehensive and outcomes-focused.





# Target Audiences

As a state university, WSSU counts among its stakeholders a broad range of audiences. Each audience requires specific content and communication styles to effectively convey the institution's message.

## Prospective Students

Recruitment is a key priority area for the university. As a historically Black university, Winston-Salem State University offers its students an "HBCU Experience." Equitable practices, proactive advising, and affordability continue to drive the demographic and psychographic profile of the students the university recruits and serves.

Further, the university's strategic plan calls upon the institution to address critical social issues, including diversifying healthcare professions, addressing the shortage of African-Americans in K-12 classrooms, and narrowing the achievement gap. Students to whom the HBCU Experience appeals include:

- students of color
- under-resourced students
- first-generation students

Because of the university's strong commitment to social justice, students in the above categories who are also driven by a desire to work toward a more just and equitable society are particularly drawn to the university.

It is also important to note that there are many other audiences that influence a student's decision to attend WSSU.

Among them are:

- parents/grandparents/guardians
- guidance counselors
- teachers
- family/friends

## External Audiences

As community-focused state institution, WSSU's external audiences play a critical role in fulfilling the university's mission and vision. Many of these audiences also have an impact on the university's financial well-being and the policy environment under which the university works.

The external audiences include:

- Alumni
- The Triad community
- The broader North Carolina community
- Lawmakers/policymakers
- Donors
- Corporate partners
- Employers

## Internal Audiences

It is important to not underestimate the importance of internal stakeholders and their role in promoting, supporting, and achieving the university's vision.

Among those stakeholders are:

- Current students
- Faculty
- Staff

## Administrative Audiences

In addition to the above audiences, there are several administrative audiences that require specific, targeted communications tactics and messaging.

Among those audiences are:

- WSSU Board of Trustees
- WSSU Foundation Board
- University of North Carolina General Administration
- Board of Governors





# Positioning Statement

Winston-Salem State University is a bold and energetic institution that fosters the creative thinking, analytical problem-solving, and depth of character needed to transform yourself and your world. Rooted in a liberal education, WSSU's curriculum prepares students to be thought leaders who have the skills and knowledge needed to develop innovative solutions to complex problems.

# Audience Messaging

Winston-Salem State University's marketing communications will feature supporting messages that are designed to resonate with its target audiences. Messaging will be rooted in the three messaging pillars, as defined in Appendix C.

## Prospective Students

Choosing to attend WSSU will be the best decision of my life. I will be part of a vibrant community that supports one another. I can be myself here and prepare for a future beyond what I can even imagine. I will be engaged in the community and will be ready to transform the world when I graduate.

## Influencers

WSSU is a great choice for my student. It will provide my student opportunities to grow and develop the skills they need to carve out an interesting and fulfilling future – all in a safe and supportive atmosphere.

## Alumni

I am proud to be an alumna/us of WSSU. My degree has allowed me to excel in my field and I am proud to support my alma mater through giving, as well as by encouraging prospective students to choose WSSU for their education. I will advocate for my institution and encourage others to understand the value of its mission.

## Employers

WSSU graduates are prepared for the workforce. They have honed the critical thinking, analytical, and leadership skills needed to be successful and effective employees. WSSU graduates are bright, hard-working, and intelligent and bring a distinct – and distinctly needed – voice to the workplace.

## Faculty/Staff

Working at WSSU means working toward something bigger than myself. I get to be a part of an organization that is transforming the lives of families for generations to come. I'm proud to be part of a team that is educating students and improving the well-being of our region. I am a valuable – and valued part of the campus community.

## Donors/Corporate Partners

My donation/partnership with WSSU is a good investment. WSSU will do a good job ensuring that my support is well used and is driven by the mission of the university. Giving to WSSU supports students who might otherwise not be able to attend college – benefitting all of us.

## Policymakers

WSSU is a unique institution in the UNC System that achieves great outcomes for its students. It provides meaningful contributions to the state and enhances the region through community engagement and cultural enrichment. Its mission is vitally important and it serves a critically important demographic of students.

## Community

WSSU is a tremendous asset to the community. Through partnerships and community engagement, the university works to help improve and enhance the region and the state.

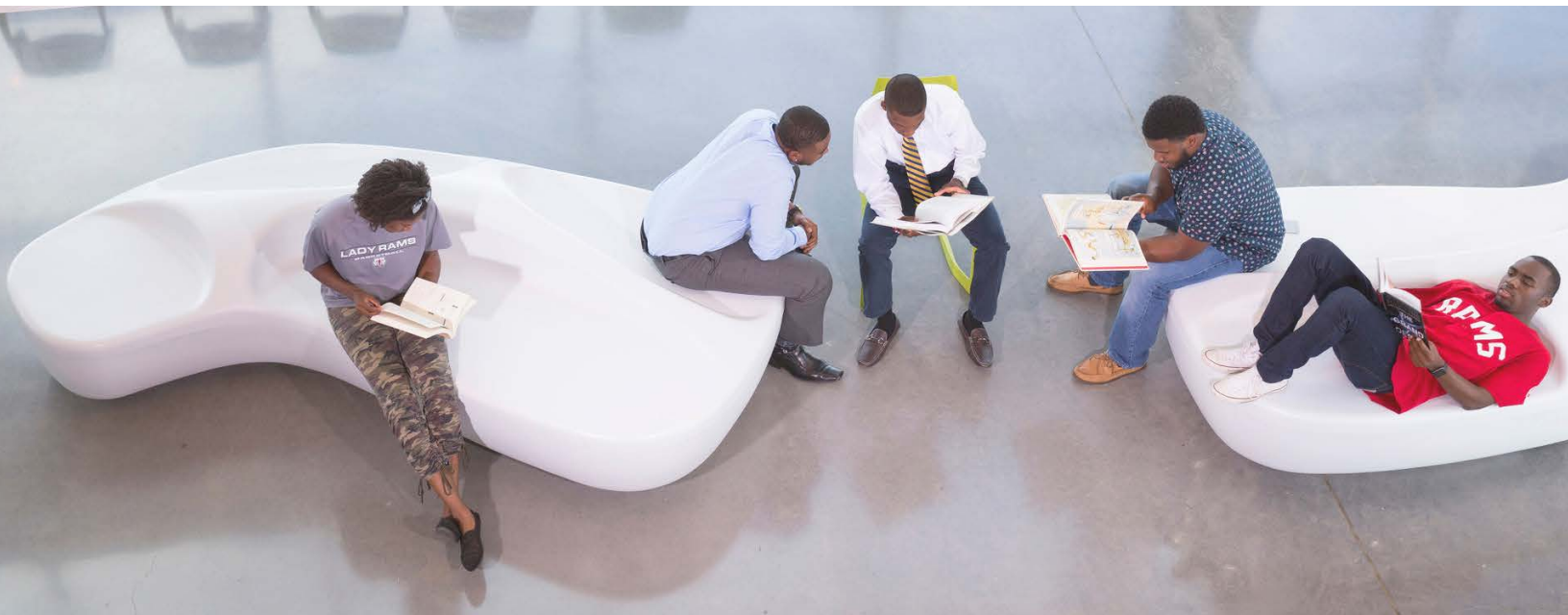


# IMC Strategy

WSSU's integrated marketing communications strategy flows directly from the university's Strategic Plan for 2016-2021, "Experiencing Academic Distinction: Transforming Learning for the 21st Century." The five goals outlined in the plan directly inform the strategic priorities of the university's overall integrated marketing communications strategy.

- Goal 1: Strengthen Liberal Education
- Goal 2: Enhance Quality of Graduate and Professional Programs
- Goal 3: Build Commitment to Social Justice Through Enhanced Community Engagement
- Goal 4: Enhance Revenue and Stewardship of Resources
- Goal 5: Enhance the Quality of Physical and Operational Infrastructure

Additionally, the university has established goals related to recruitment that also inform this plan. The desired makeup of the WSSU student body is 5,000 traditional undergraduate students, 500 Extension School students, and 500 graduate students by 2021.



## Strategy 1: Strengthen WSSU's reputation through strategic, integrated communications

Ensuring that the university's brand is strong and its reputation solid requires a strategic, integrated communications approach. Clear, consistent, targeted messaging will be used to convey the university's distinctive competitive advantage.

Align resources to focus on WSSU's brand platform and the focus areas defined in the university's strategic plan to proactively:

- Raise awareness of the university's liberal education approach;
- Strengthen the reputation of the university's professional and graduate programs;
- Highlight the university's commitment to social justice and community engagement;
- Support recruitment of students ideally suited to the university's mission and approach;
- Support the university's fundraising and revenue generation efforts; and
- Highlight the strong outcomes of the university to strengthen perceptions among policymakers.

Encourage collaboration between media relations, digital communications, and marketing to better coordinate efforts and strengthen the reach of messaging by establishing practices that:

- Provide a multi-channel approach to marketing communications projects;
- Use photography and videography to highlight key aspects of the university's brand platform and to address perception issues as identified in the brand perception survey (Appendix B);
- Focus resources on channels that demonstrate the best return on investment; and
- Identify trending topics to allow content to be leveraged to address those trends.



Develop content for use across channels that:

- Highlights one or more of the university's brand messaging pillars;
- Raises awareness of the university's liberal education approach;
- Highlights focus areas identified in the university's strategic plan;
- Supports university fundraising efforts;
- Supports the legislative and policy priorities of the university and the UNC system; and
- Promotes the university's cultural, educational, and athletics events.

Use strategic media relations to enhance the university's reputation:

- Promote faculty and staff to the media as experts by:
  - Developing an experts guide cataloging faculty expertise;
  - Using ProfNet to pitch faculty experts to national media;
  - Hosting media training sessions for faculty and staff; and
  - Nominating faculty and staff for media awards.
- Increase positive media mentions for the university by:
  - Using social media to engage with PR targets/influencers;
  - Feeding social media with PR content, creating a content flow for news articles to official social media;
  - Identifying lists, contests and other ways for WSSU to be featured through media and blogs; and
  - Developing a calendar for media awards and nominate the university for strategic awards.

Redesign the the university's website to support the university's recruitment, retention, and fundraising goals by:

- Re-designing the homepage to serve as a "front door" for prospective students;
- Engaging prospective donors, corporate partners, and alumni to encourage gifts;
- Organizing content to be easily accessible for current students and faculty and staff;
- Showcasing the campus through imagery and multimedia; and
- Highlighting the university's academic offerings to ensure prospective students can easily identify and learn more about their programs of choice.



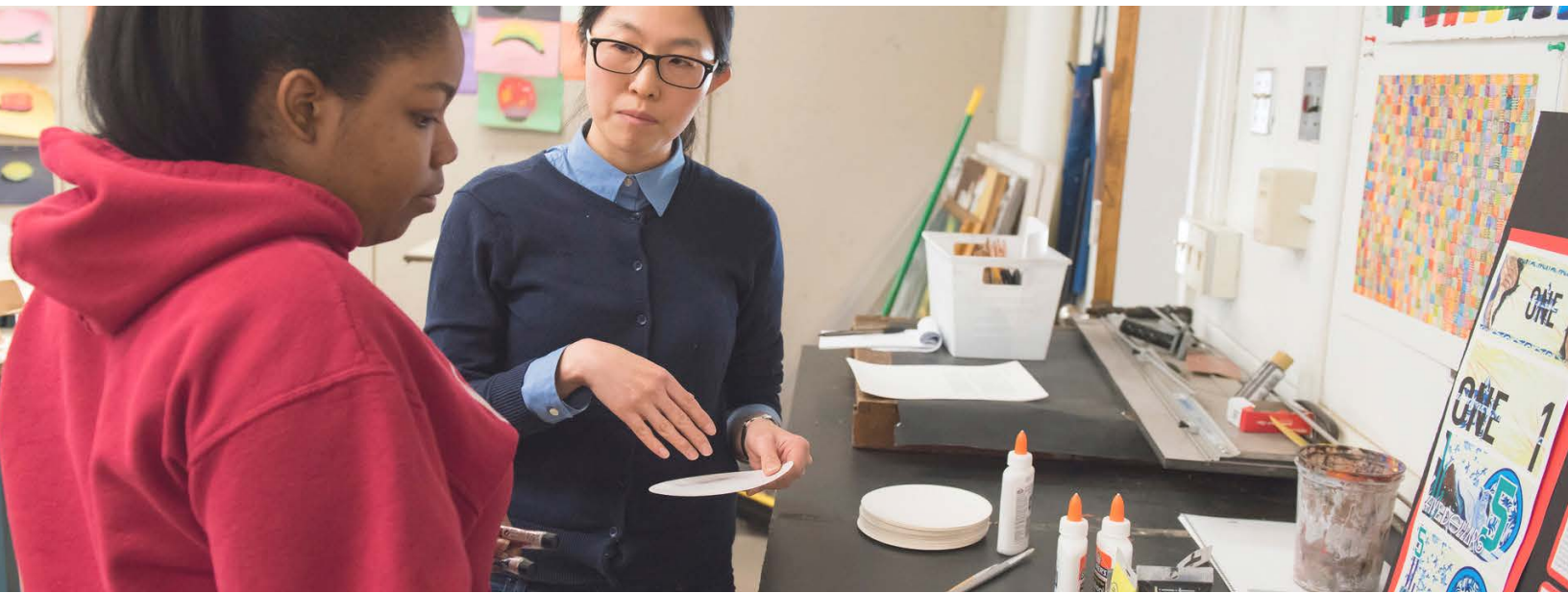


Use social media to strengthen the university's reputation and encourage engagement among its audiences by:

- Creating a social media policy to ensure that all social media managers across the university engage in practices that are consistent with the university's strategy;
- Creating a Social Media Users Group to provide campus users with information about best practices and to encourage collaboration;
- Incorporating the student voice into social media efforts;
- Investing in social media monitoring and collaboration tools to maintain consistency and quality across the university's channels; and
- Developing robust social media campaigns in support of the university's branding, marketing, and communications efforts.

Evaluate the potential benefits of centralizing communications functions on campus by:

- Auditing the communications produced by various departments on campus to identify any overlaps or gaps;
- Assessing the existing partnerships between IMC and other units to determine if issues may be resolved by consolidation.



## Strategy 2: Implement consistent brand advertising

To best ensure the greatest return on investment, brand advertising must be both strategic and consistent.

Leverage the latest technology to ensure advertising is targeted to key audiences by:

- Strategically selecting advertising opportunities that allow for greater targeting of audiences;
- Moving away from print advertising and toward targeted digital campaigns;
- Identifying an agency or firm to assist with digital media buys; and
- Using key performance indicators (KPIs) to determine the ROI on efforts and adjust campaigns accordingly.

Collaborate with enrollment management to ensure branding efforts support recruitment by:

- Timing advertising efforts to support the university's recruitment cycle.
- Requesting reports that help demonstrate the ROI of efforts.
- Adjusting campaigns based on enrollment reports.

Ensure professional and effective brand presence at all WSSU events by:

- Assisting departments in the development of high-quality materials.
- Working with the Office of University and Donor Events to establish timelines that allow for high-quality materials to be developed for events.

# Strategy 3:

## Support strategic recruitment efforts

- Work with enrollment management to develop clear communications strategies for communicating with prospective students and admitted students.
- Time advertising efforts to support the recruitment cycle.
- Target advertising in areas that are key targets for Admissions.
- Develop robust strategies for recruiting transfer and graduate students.
- Support new programs and programs with room for growth with multi-channel marketing campaigns.

# Strategy 4:

## Ignite internal and external brand champions

Communicate the university's brand platform and messaging to current and future WSSU faculty and staff to inspire them to become brand champions by:

- Hosting workshops on campus for faculty and staff to learn more about the university's branding and communications efforts;
- Providing a toolbox for faculty and staff to access when creating their own communications materials; and
- Developing collateral materials to help faculty and staff communicate brand messaging to their audiences.

Collaborate with enrollment management to ensure branding efforts support recruitment by:

- Working with University Advancement and Alumni Relations to overhaul electronic communications to alumni and friends;
- Engaging alumni and friends through the university's social media channels; and
- Reducing the annual number of print issues of the institutional magazine and focus resources instead on targeted online channels

Provide transparent, branded communications with faculty and staff to keep them informed of developments that are points of pride for the university by:

- Revising the university's internal communications tools to be more engaging and easier to access;
- Providing a faculty/staff "hub" on the website with news, events, and other important information; and
- Updating the Campus Announcements guidelines and processes to better serve the campus community.

Engage elected officials, community leaders, and other policy makers by working with External Relations to develop communications that showcase the university, the work of its faculty/staff, and the success of its students.