

AC 2021-2022 Assessment

Public Information & Media Relations, Marketing & Branding

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Northwestern Mission. Northwestern State University is a responsive, student-oriented institution committed to acquiring, creating, and disseminating knowledge through innovative teaching, research, and service. With its certificate, undergraduate, and graduate programs, Northwestern State University prepares its increasingly diverse student population to contribute to an inclusive global community with a steadfast dedication to improving our region, state, and nation.

External Affairs: External Affairs provides multimedia services to promote a positive image of Northwestern State University through relationships with the local community, the media, our alumni, prospective students, donors and government and civic leaders. These offices units play an important role in showcasing the university and impacting enrollment, fundraising, alumni and community involvement, and other goals. The Division is directly involved in promoting a learning-centered environment, improving retention and graduation rates and maintaining a positive, student-oriented atmosphere. External Affairs includes a diverse segment of the university that includes Athletics, Alumni and Development, Wellness, Recreation and Activities Center (WRAC); The Robert Wilson Recreation Complex; NSU Press/Publications, Marketing and Branding, NSU TV, University Printing, the News Bureau (Office of Communications), Photo Services and Sports Information.

Public Information & Media Relations/Marketing & Branding and Mission: The mission of the two units is to promote the university, its students, faculty, staff, programming, accomplishments and resources to external audiences through a variety of media platforms. These units work collaboratively with each other and with personnel from throughout the campus to highlight activities, events, opportunities and milestones related to all aspects of Northwestern State. The work of the units helps attract and retain students as well as enhances alumni relations, fund raising and community engagement.

Methodology: The assessment process includes:

- (1) Data from assessment tools (both direct – indirect, quantitative and qualitative) are collected and returned to the executive director;
- (2) The executive director will analyze the data to determine whether the applicable outcomes are met:
- (3) Results from the assessment will be discussed with the appropriate staff;
- (4) Individual meetings will be held with staff as required (show cause);

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(5) The executive director, in consultation with the staff and senior leadership, will determine propose changes to measurable outcomes, assessment tools for the next assessment period and, where needed, service changes.

Service Outcomes:

SO 1. Create broad and positive exposure for Northwestern State on the local, regional and national level by (1) Promotion of programs and opportunities available by (2) promotion of student, faculty and institutional accomplishments and (3) increased engagement both internally and externally.

Measure 1.1.

Public Information/Media Relations issues timely press releases, website updates and accompanying photos and graphics with the goal of engagement by 100 percent of local media, 60 percent of regional media and 30 percent of national print and online media organizations.

Finding: Target met.

Analysis: In 2020-21 the target was engagement by 100 percent of local media, 60 percent of regional media and 30 percent of national print and online media organizations. Based on the analysis of these results in 2021-2022 personnel targeted press releases to specific markets and observed spikes of interested related to Athletics and Recruiting initiatives. Staff maintained a proactive approach in reaching out to media to “pitch” story ideas to relevant markets.

Following a year deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, news and media outlets sought angles from the college student perspective that generated positive exposure for the university’s return to “normalcy.” PIMR personnel at NSU coordinated and communicated with sister schools in the University of Louisiana System to send cohesive, comprehensive messaging in regards to campus operations affecting stakeholders on a local, state and national level.

In 2021-2022, the target was met. News outlets were receptive to all press releases related to the return to classes, athletic events, commencement programs and normal campus activities and they resumed.

Based on the number and frequency of press releases, photos and social media posts and shares, along with the growth in updates and human-interest stories that developed as the campus returned to normal operations, NSU news reached most targeted media outlets. News outlets were also receptive to information disseminated regarding the presidential search and announcements.

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This goal was met on the local and regional level. From July 2020- March 2021, NSU News Bureau and Sports Information combined to distribute over 1,298 press releases and accompanying photos and social media posts. This figure is more than double the publications from the previous year when many events and sports contests were cancelled during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Action - Decision or Recommendation: Based on the analysis of 2021-2022 results Public Information & Media Relations will in 2022-2023 work with other units on campus – and with our sister schools in the UL System -- to maximize publicity for the university’s assets, programs, accomplishments and opportunities, pandemic recovery and plans for moving forward. The staff should continue to strategically “pitch” stories to specific markets, localize stories when necessary and continue to make new media contacts.

Measure 1.2.

Marketing and Branding will increase the university’s social media engagement by 15 percent per year.

Finding: Target not met.

Analysis: In 2021-2022, the target was to increase social media engagement by 15 percent. Based on the analysis of these results in 2020-21, engagement did not grow and two staff changes took place. The director of Marketing and Branding was replaced, followed shortly thereafter by the departure of the assistant director/videographer and the administrative assistant.

Consequently, the interim director, Emily Zering, spent most of the year rebuilding the structure of the unit, sorting and correcting fiscal and time mismanagement and misrepresentation of growth from the previous year. Student workers and a new administrative assistant joined the staff and began work with steep learning curves.

Video and social media campaigns are currently being redeveloped as the unit is being reorganized with plans in development with other units, such as Recruiting, to refocus on the unit’s primary focus of recruiting, retention and engagement.

As a result, the target was not met.

From July 2021 - March 2022, Facebook fan growth decreased by 3.9%. Page visits increased by 2.2%. New likes decreased 9.4%. Current total page likes is 39,066. Current Instagram followers are at 21.3K, maintained through the year. The previous marketing director paid for followers, so statistics were misrepresented for 2021-21. Twitter current followers number 8,884.

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As of June 2022, the office is fully staffed for the first time this year. The new staff will integrate social media with efforts in other digital spaces to increase exposure to NSU's brand as well as engagement across all platforms.

Based on the analysis of the results from last year, data indicates that by reorganizing the Office of Marketing and Branding, refocusing on social media campaigns in conjunction with campus activities, events and holidays will make a positive impact in social media engagement. The new director is also focused on sorting problems that arose through fiscal, time and personnel mismanagement so that going forward, data should indicate that Marketing and Branding play an important role in the mission of the university and its stakeholders.

Action - Decision or Recommendation: Based on the analysis of the 2021-2022 results, Marketing and Branding in 2022-2023 will strategically plan social media campaigns in conjunction with activities, events and holidays, in addition to consistent and responsible advertising initiatives and accountability in money, time and personnel management. Marketing and Branding will continue to explore emerging social media platforms and measure their effectiveness towards advancing the university's mission.

SO 2. Public Information/Media Relations and Marketing and Branding support the university's internal and external communication efforts to increase brand recognition and impact.

Measure 2.1.

Each unit monitors earned media, growth of network, video views, website hits and other analytics with the goal of a 15 percent annually to demonstrate increased engagement and interest in NSU.

Finding: Target not met.

Analysis: Data on video and social media campaigns for 2021-22 was misrepresented. From July 2021 - March 2022, Facebook fan growth decreased by 3.9%. Page visits increased by 2.2%. New likes decreased 9.4%. Current total page likes is 39,066. Current Instagram followers are at 21.3K, maintained through the year. The previous marketing director paid for followers, so statistics were misrepresented for 2021-21. Twitter current followers number 8,884.

Based on the analysis of the results, the Office of Marketing and Branding is currently under a new director with a new assistant director and administrative assistant in place. As a result, in 2022-23 units used analytic tools to measure engagement and will continue to market the university's programming.

The units used Meltwater and social media analytics to measure engagement. Engagement was not healthy in 2020-2021. The former unit director misrepresented social media growth and provided no data on cost effective advertising. The loss of a videographer and administrative assistant impacted the unit's productivity. The new

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interim director was required to devote an exorbitant amount of time, energy and resources into sorting out mismanaged data and accounts from the previous director.

In 2022, NSU did not renew the Meltwater account and instead joined sister ULS schools in subscribing to data analysis service Cision, both for its effectiveness and as a cost-saving measure. Preliminary data on Cision use is unavailable.

Spikes in social media/external media engagement tend occur in conjunction with campus events that follow the academic calendar, such as Freshman Connection, Welcome Week, Christmas Gala, Commencement, and other large campus events

NSU Press, NSU Publications and University Printing continue to support units across campus. From July 2021-April 2022, NSU Publications completed 1,122 jobs for a variety of units and divisions across campus, an increase of 30 percent over the previous year. Due to budget cuts, the Assistant Director of Publications position was eliminated, and staff member Hollis Ervin was let go, leading to a loss of office morale. Jobs completed by University Printing increased to 264 departmental jobs and non-departmental jobs that earned \$26,875 for the university's general fund. Regulations adopted in 2020 prohibit the printing for private groups and organizations unrelated to NSU.

Action - Decision or Recommendation: Based on the analysis of 2020-2021 results, the Director of Publications will take on the work left by the loss of the assistant director position. As of June 2022, the office is fully staffed for the first time in 2022. The new staff will integrate social media with efforts in other digital spaces to increase exposure to NSU's brand as well as engagement across all platforms.

SO 3. PI&MR and Marketing and Branding stay current on trends in media and promote an atmosphere of teamwork and collaboration.

Measure 3.1.

Units attend at least one (more when feasible) professional development conference or webinar per year to sustain quality in writing, editing, graphic design photography, videography and other communication arts and to monitor pertinent trends in the industry.

Finding: This goal was not met.

Analysis: In 2021-2022 the target was to attend at least one professional development conference per year. Time, funding and personnel were unavailable for staff to engage in professional development opportunities.

Engaging in professional development increases enthusiasm, team-building and generates ideas for increasing engagement and media relations. As a result, in 2021-2022 the target was not met. Time, resources, staff changes and other factors preventing staff from pursuing professional development opportunities.

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Action – Based on the analysis of 2021-2022 results, in 2022-2023 units will seek professional development opportunities through the University of Louisiana System and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, as well as with inter-office teambuilding and strategic planning.

Measure 3.2.

The units will hold weekly meetings to discuss projects and their progress and share information relevant to completing projects in a professional manner and a timely fashion. Success is defined as meeting 100 percent of deadlines and producing quality work with 0 percent errors.

Finding: This goal was not met.

Analysis: In 2020-2021 the target was to meet weekly to discuss projects and their progress. Based on the analysis of these results in 2021-2022, staff should strive to meet regularly to better formulate and coordinate strategies to produce work that underpins the mission of the university.

Action – Based on the analysis of the 2020-2021 results, the units will set regular meeting times to share ideas and facilitate projects being completed in a professional manner and a timely fashion for 2022-2023.

Comprehensive summary of key evidence of improvement based on analysis of results:

- Personnel targeted press releases to specific markets and observed spikes of interested related to Athletics, Recruiting and commencement initiatives. In addition, staff maintained a proactive approach in reaching out to media to “pitch” story ideas to relevant markets.
- Personnel changes in Marketing and Branding precipitated a reorganization with the goal of better management in the future. The loss of a staff member in Publications negatively affected morale.
- The units worked together and with other units on campus on strategic initiatives and campaigns to increase social media engagement and crisis communication.
- Unit heads should pursue professional development opportunities as they become available.
- Strategic planning and collaboration will be key to developing better teamwork.

Plan of action moving forward.

Public Information & Media Relations and Marketing and Branding work with internal and external stakeholders to promote the image of Northwestern State, viewing their roles as critical in vaulting Northwestern State to becoming the nation’s premier regional university. Though staffs are small and resources are limited, each team member exhibits dedication to the quality of their product and to the reputation of the university.

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The units will continue to reach out to media to pitch story ideas and continue to target markets with relevant content.

Because technology and media platforms continue to evolve, the team is challenged to stay current and relevant to several different demographics and fluent in technology to utilize traditional and non-traditional media platforms.

The team will attend at least two professional development workshops/conferences and active engage in teambuilding and strategic planning.