

AC 2023-2024 Assessment

Public Information & Media Relations, Marketing & Branding

Prepared by: Leah Jackson

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Approved by: Dr. Drake Owens

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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 Alumni and Development, The Robert Wilson Recreation Complex; NSU Press/Publications, Marketing and Branding, 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 2023-24 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 2023-2024 personnel targeted press releases to specific markets and observed spikes related to Athletics. SID staff worked with university officials and an outside communications firm, as well as local law enforcement agencies, to communicate with the public regarding the death of a student-athlete. The incident created national negative exposure for the university and the Athletic Department

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.

Sports Information garnered media coverage on athletes transferring into and out of NSU with the new transfer portal. Media profiles of student-athletes with Name Likeness Image contracts also generated earned media. All efforts were supported by Photo Services and NSU Publications.

In 2023-2024, 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, while local, state and national coverage of the death of the student-athlete was extensive and negative. In 2023, the News Bureau and Sports Information Office developed a relationship with the Shreveport/Bossier Advocate, which resulted in some positive coverage of Homecoming in 2023.

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Based on the number and frequency of press releases, photos and social media posts and shares, along with the growth in updates and student-athlete stories that developed, NSU news reached most targeted media outlets.

This goal was met on the local and regional level. From July 2023-June 2024, NSU News Bureau and Sports Information combined to distribute over 886 press releases and 259 photos and accompanying photos and social media posts.

Action - Decision or Recommendation: Based on the analysis of 2023-2024 results Public Information & Media Relations will in 2024-2025 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 met.

Analysis: In 2023-2024, the target was to increase social media engagement by 15 percent. Based on the analysis of these results in 2023-24, engagement grew as student workers were added to the staff. Marketing and Branding continue to focus on social media growth and analytics with positive results.

Video and social media campaigns were redeveloped in cooperation with and with input from with other units, such as Recruiting, to focus on the unit’s primary mission of recruiting, retention, awareness and engagement.

As a result, the target was met.

From July 2023 - March 2024, NSU’s social media footprint grew significantly. Social media engagement grew by approximately 48 percent. The regular use of Tik Tok, in addition to Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, showed significant engagement among prospective students.

The director of Marketing and Branding and her assistant developed effective strategies to increase social media engagement, integrating strategic social media campaigns 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 reorganizing the Office of Marketing and Branding and added student workers who focused on social

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media campaigns in conjunction with campus activities, events and holidays made a significant positive impact in social media engagement. The director continues to focus on growing the university's external visual presence and social media presence 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 2023-2024 results, in 2024-2025 the Marketing Department will continue to invest, schedule and track analytics across social media platform use.

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 met.

Analysis: The October 2023 death of a student-athlete generated negative local, regional and national coverage of the university and the Athletic Department. An outside communications firm was engaged by the university to hand media requests, as the matter remained under investigation and legal matters were a consideration. Student photographers and videographers resulted in an increase in social media engagement among prospective students. The director of marketing continues to devote a significant amount of time, energy and resources into growing online engagement and visual prominence.

Based on the analysis of the results, NSU's media and social media received extensive negative exposure, but the engagement of an outside communications firm prohibited the teams from creating content related to the ongoing investigation into the death of a student-athlete. However, positive content was generated with the hiring of a new football coach.

As a result, in 2024-25 units will continue to use analytic tools to measure engagement and will continue to market the university's programming.

The units, along with sister schools in the University of Louisiana System, continue to utilize a Cision account for better media monitoring.

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

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NSU Press, NSU Publications, Photo Services and Sports Information continue to support units across campus. From July 2023-June 2024, NSU Publications completed 1268 jobs for a variety of units and divisions across campus. One special job resulted in \$210.

Purchases of books from the NSU Press totaled \$694. Cookbook purchases totaled \$200 for the NSU Foundation.

Action - Decision or Recommendation: Based on the analysis of 2023-2024, NSU Press will continue to market books for sale. NSU Photo Services and NSU Publications will continue to work with the campus community to advance the mission of the university.

The staff will continue to 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 met.

Analysis: In 2022-2023 the target was to attend at least one professional development conference per year.

Engaging in professional development increases enthusiasm, teambuilding and generates ideas for increasing engagement and media relations. As a result, in 2023-2024 the director of Public Information and Media Relations attended the University of Louisiana's "For Our Future Conference" in New Orleans.

Action – Based on the analysis of 2023-2024 results, in 2024-2025 units will seek professional development opportunities through the University of Louisiana System and other organizations as they become available.

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.

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Finding: This goal was met.

Analysis: In 2023-2024 the target was to meet weekly to discuss projects and their progress, as well as collaborate on joint projects to promote the university. Based on the analysis of these results in 2024-2025, staff should continue to meet regularly to continue to formulate and coordinate strategies to produce work that underpins the mission of the university.

Action – Based on the analysis of the 2023-2024 results, the units will continue to meet, share ideas and facilitate projects that support the mission of the two units: recruiting, retention and fundraising.

Comprehensive summary of key evidence of improvement based on analysis of results: The following reflects the changes implemented to drive the continuous process of seeking improvement in AC 2023-24. These changes are based on the knowledge gained through the analysis of AC 2022-2023 results.

- In addition to regular press releases targeted to specific markets, significant spikes in media coverage resulted from the well-publicized and on-going investigation into the death of a student-athlete, which received local, regional and national media coverage. An outside communications firm was engaged to handle external communications on the matter, while the units continued to create and disseminate positive news at NSU.
- Staff took a proactive approach in reaching out to media to “pitch” story ideas to relevant markets, as well as increase social media engagement.
- The addition of active, competent student workers to the Marketing team increased engagement. The units will communicate more effectively to leverage better outcomes.
- 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 pursued professional development opportunities through conferences and webinars.
- Strategic planning and collaboration improved to develop better teamwork.

Plan of action moving forward.

Public Information & Media Relations and Marketing & 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 staff are small and resources limited, each team member exhibits dedication to the quality of their product and to the reputation of the university. The units will continue to reach out to media to pitch story ideas and continue to target markets with relevant content.

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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 one and preferably two professional development workshops/conferences and active engage in teambuilding and strategic planning.