

AC 2024-2025 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: The Division of External Affairs was dissolved in 2024. Units in the Division were reassigned. Sports Information now reports to the Athletic Director. The WRAC and Rec Complex report to the Executive Director of Wellness & Recreation/Deputy Athletic Director. Alumni and Development report to the director of Economic Development and University Advancement. Public Information & Media Relations and the Office of Marketing & Branding now report to the Chief Marketing Officer.

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);
- (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.

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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 2023-2024 the target was met. 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 2024-2025 personnel targeted press releases to specific markets. News was generated by the departure of President Marcus Jones and the hiring of Justice James Genovese as president was significant in Louisiana. The Genovese investiture created scrutiny that kept NSU in the news throughout Louisiana for several weeks. A visit to Natchitoches and NSU by Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry also generated significant state-wide news coverage.

As a result, in 2024-2025, the target was met. News outlets were receptive to all press releases related to the return to classes, Presidential Investiture, commencement programs and normal campus activities. The Departure of President Marcus Jones and the hiring of James Genovese generated news throughout the state.

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

This goal was met on the local and regional level. From July 2024-June 2025, NSU News Bureau distributed over 800 press releases with accompanying photos and posted more than 500 articles on the NSULA website.

Action - Decision or Recommendation: Based on the analysis of 2024-2025 results Public Information & Media Relations will in 2025-2026 work with other units on campus to continue to maximize publicity for the university's assets, programs, accomplishments and opportunities 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.

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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 met. The intent was to increase social media engagement by 15 percent. Based on the analysis of these results in 2024-2025, 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 other units, such as Recruiting, to focus on the unit's primary mission of recruiting, retention, awareness and engagement. Two student workers were added to the staff to handle content creation.

As a result, the target was met.

From July 2024 - June 2025, NSU's social media footprint grew significantly. Social media engagement (likes, shares, comments across all channels) grew by approximately 28 percent. Transitioning content to video-heavy testimonials and spotlights and a higher posting frequency resulted in +20% month-over-month. The Purple Friday Podcast, Demons Become, and Demons Take Flight campaigns were particularly effective.

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. This includes the UGC ("tag & share") Push in which students were encouraged to tag NSU in their own photos. This resulted in 1,200+ UGC posts, boosting organic reach by 18% and Platform-Specific Copy: Short, punchy TikTok captions vs. more formal LinkedIn posts—lifted TikTok follower growth by 22%.

Marketing & Branding produced 120 videos (short-form reels, TikToks, and other videos across platforms). The average engagement rate was 8% (well above industry average of 4–5%).

Based on the analysis of the results from last year, data indicates that reorganizing the Office of Marketing and Branding and adding student workers who focused on social 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.

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Action - Decision or Recommendation: Based on the analysis of the 2024-2025 results, in 2025-2026 the Office of Marketing and Branding will 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: In 2023-2024 the target was met. Top news generating events at NSU were the departure of former President Marcus Jones and the hiring of Justice James Genovese as president created news that was shared throughout Louisiana, beyond the usual scope of the university's media outlets. Further exposure was generated by a cutting edge class on artificial intelligence taught by an alumnus. In conjunction with the class, several public forums were hosted by the university to showcase the class and instructors.

Marketing and Branding specifically targets prospective students (high school juniors/seniors) through Instagram, TikTok, paid social media ads, paid google ads, and digital and print mail. The unit targets current students through Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, event/ campus coverage and engagement. M&B targets alumni & perspective families through LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, targeted ads on social media and google, email and print marketing materials, and radio and print ads.

Public Information engages public media and communicates with alumni by producing four editions of Alumni Columns Magazine per year.

The University engaged PR Wire to distribute news regarding the new president and the investiture and a highly anticipated class in Artificial Intelligence.

Based on the analysis of the results, NSU's media and social media received reached a wider audience in 2024-25 due in part to the presidential change and the highly publicized AI course.

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

Spikes in social media/external media engagement occurred 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 and Photo Services support units across campus. From July 2024-June 2025, NSU Publications completed 812 jobs for a variety of units and divisions across campus. A special program created for LMTA resulted in \$276.

Purchases of books from the NSU Press totaled \$1,408 for the general fund. Cookbook purchases totaled \$306 for the NSU Foundation.

The Chief Marketing Officer at Northwestern State launched a redesign of the university website in August 2024 and contracted with Push10, a respected agency, with the goal of completing the redesign by August 2025. Progress is on target to meet this goal.

This months-long process has been detailed and engaged many academic and administrative units for updates. The new website, which is user-friendly and easy to navigate and has a modern look and feel. The expectation is that the new website will present a modern, dynamic and cohesive image for NSU.

Redevelopment of the university website included the following components:

- Reconsider website messaging to appeal to prospective students
- Showcase campus culture through storytelling, imagery, and video
- Differentiate NSULA from competitive schools
- Showcase student career success
- Add robust site-wide search capability
- Optimize the website for mobile viewing
- Make it easy to browse degree programs
- Provide clear calls-to-action to encourage enrollment or campus tour sign-ups.

Action - Decision or Recommendation: Based on the analysis of 2024-2025, NSU Press will market books for sale. NSU Photo Services and NSU Publications will work with the campus community to advance the mission of the university.

The 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 2023-2024 the target was not met.

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Based on the analysis of these results, in 2024-2025, the director of Public Information and Media Relations attended the University of Louisiana's "For Our Future Conference" in Baton Rouge. Personnel from Marketing and Branding were not able to attend a conference. As a result, the target was not met.

Action - Decision or Recommendation: Based on the analysis of 2024-2025 results, in 2025-2026 units will seek professional development opportunities through the University of Louisiana System and other organizations and attend at least one professional development meeting or conference. Engaging in professional development increases enthusiasm, teambuilding and generates ideas for increasing engagement and media relations.

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 2023-2024 the target not met. The goal was to meet weekly to discuss projects and their progress, as well as collaborate on joint projects to promote the university. As a result, based on the analysis of these results in 2024-2025, staff will coordinate schedules to meet regularly to formulate strategies to produce work that underpins the mission of the university, however lack of resources, scheduling conflicts and overall chaos was not conducive to meeting the target.

Action – Decision or Recommendation: Based on the analysis of the 2024-2025 results, the units will coordinate weekly meetings to share ideas and facilitate projects that support the mission of the 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 2024-25. These changes are based on the knowledge gained through the analysis of AC 2023-2024 results.

- In addition to regular press releases targeted to specific markets, significant spikes in media coverage resulted from the departure of the university president and the hiring of a new president, which received local, regional and national media coverage.
- Staff maintained 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 communicated 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.

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- Strategic planning and collaboration improved to develop better teamwork.
- A new student spotlight campaign is underway and a Parent Perks campaign has launched, which encourages parents to explore local resources with discounts offered to them.

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