

**Strategic Task Force
End of Year Progress Report (May 2014)**

Task Force Name: Marketing Communications Task Force

Charge: Participate in the development of appropriate communications responses to the objectives and strategies outlined in Goal 4 of the University strategic plan, highlighted most significantly by a market-research project that will inform the creation of a new aspirational positioning statement.

Committee Members: Jeff Cook, Greg Saks, Ari Kilian, Sally Starr, Stephen García, Carolyn Coal, Peter Evanow, Bill Briggs

Meeting Dates: 10/23/13, 2/4/14, 2/14/14, 4/15/14, 4/21/14, 4/25/14, 4/30/14 (The task force's work was mirrored/supported by review and counsel from the Foundation's Marketing Communications/Titan Pride Committee, which met 11/5/13, 2/11/14, 4/15/14, and 4/30/14).

Summary of Work Performed: The task force provided counsel during the data collection phase of the market-research effort. The study blended insight gained from online surveys, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and telephone surveys with multiple internal and external audiences. At the end of the research phase, the most valuable contribution of the task force was the creation of an aspirational positioning statement and supporting proof points that, in final form, will be the beacon for editorial, design, media-outreach, and other communications decision-making moving forward. They should also help inform broader operational/programmatic responses by the University.

Recommendations: A response plan by Strategic Communications will be drafted by June 30, 2014, with many of the items discussed by the committee over the year. The current draft of the recommended positioning statement, a signature goal of the task force, reads:

A leading institution of the CSU system, Cal State Fullerton is an investment-worthy intellectual and cultural center for Orange County, an invaluable partner in workforce and economic development throughout the region, and a national model for supporting student success through innovative high-impact educational and co-curricular experiences, including faculty-student collaborative research.

The University embraces its rich diversity, recognizing that it both enhances the educational experience for students and uniquely prepares them to excel as emergent leaders in the global marketplace, in further education, and in their communities.

Together with Cal State Fullerton's unmatched value and long-standing commitment to accessibility, these defining competitive advantages are resulting in the institution growing as a first-choice option for prospective students and employees, and being increasingly attractive for both private and public support.

The final draft of the response plan will likely include action steps that address:

- adoption of the aspirational positioning statement and supporting proof points
- adoption of "Titans Reach Higher" as the singular University tagline for use as a core creative expression
- complementary internal promotional efforts to fully embrace the new tagline campuswide
- updating CSUF boilerplate language used on news releases and other communications based on the new positioning statement

- “road shows” to divisions and departments reviewing lessons learned from research study, new pivots, and reminders about conventions governing editorial development and design
- updating the existing communications plan (used by Strategic Communications) and communications-resources website
- continuing efforts to rein-in errant logos, taglines, poor and/or inconsistent design choices, and off-message narratives
- convening conversations around implications for more effective donor cultivation
- planning efforts with editorial staff in Strategic Communications regarding necessary editorial pivots to support new positioning statement, and ensuring thematic integration across all news content and communications projects
- efforts to better promote news site and social channels
- Strategic Communications’ work with the OU Users Group to ensure adherence to established templates and adoption by OU by all colleges, divisions, and branch campuses
- renewing and expanding the University’s paid advertising plan
- reimagining and refreshing the Titans Reach Higher website as a primary brand-messaging site, with tie-in to the internal Communications Resources site for tools and guidance applicable to employees
- initiating deeper discussion around:
 - an institutional shift to embrace students conceptually as future alumni or alumni-in-residence, which will prompt a framing shift in how we relate and deliver service
 - tradition-building and defining the Titan Experience as a student as an extension of the positioning statement, exploring in particular the question of “How do we develop emotional richness around CSUF?”
 - the importance of physical environment and how it reflects on the institution and affects affinity for the institution among stakeholders

Conclusions: With the “heavy-lifting” completed by the task force, the formal committee has officially concluded its work. However, as implementation/operationalization of the response plan proceeds over the coming year, task force members will remain engaged informally in this work.

To recap the research study of stakeholder perceptions on which the recommended plan is based, the project revealed that:

- Cal State Fullerton has no systemic problems in the market, and indeed, the market generally

responds to us very well.

- Perceptions about our University are diffuse, and sometimes land on attributes that are positive yet not particularly compelling.
- Moving forward, there is opportunity to exercise greater discipline in order to help shape perceptions in more helpful ways. We can also work to educate stakeholders on some key issues and address pockets of weaker support.
- There is opportunity to define a unique space in the market that:
 - is achievable and exciting to current and prospective donors, students, employees, and other stakeholders of interest, helping to advance key organizational interests and objectives
 - is consistent with our strategic plan
 - presents a compelling vision of our educational/student-support offerings
 - illustrates our role in economic and workforce development
 - reinforces our role of being a leading CSU campus

The response plan seeks to capitalize on these conclusions.