<center>**Communications White Paper Draft**</center>

Background

Internal and external communication is critical for recruitment and retention of students, employees, and donors, successful customer service, and for the implementation of the strategic plan. ECU's current department focusing on external communication is Communications and Marketing, which has 4 staff members, compared to an estimated national average of 7 staff members for a university similar in size to ECU. Limited resources have significantly affected the ability of the department to accomplish what their professional knowledge recommends. There is currently no personnel dedicated to internal communications. Leaving the responsibility of internal communication to personnel in all departments has resulted in a lack of accountability in making sure messages are communicated in a timely and appropriate manner. These limitations have resulted in two major issues that are currently affecting recruitment, retention and customer service:

1. Lack of a clear message about what sets ECU apart from other universities
   a. This is negatively affecting student recruitment and retention, but also community awareness of and support for ECU. The community is not aware of the economic impact of ECU.
2. Student and employee frustration with finding information on critical processes
   a. Resolving this frustration is key to improving customer service and recruitment and retention of students and employees.

Addressing these two issues requires empowering personnel with the appropriate skills, motivation, authority, resources and compensation. It also means avoiding "mission creep" that would dilute personnel's ability to successfully meet the core needs of their position. In addition, any new proposals to address these issues need maintenance and accountability plans to be successful.

Lessons Learned

Budget limitations have restricted the amount of resources dedicated to communications in the past. Even though budget limitations are still an issue, communication efforts must be prioritized because they are key in increasing and managing existing funding through recruitment and retention of students and donors and decreasing expense through retention of employees. ECU has built a foundation of branding efforts that must continue in all future plans for internal and external communication.

More specifically, to address the lack of a clear message about what sets ECU apart from other universities, a 2017 study by Ruffalo Noel Levitz on ECU's marketing practices revealed the following:

- ECU needs to brag about the university's achievements
- ECU needs to create communication plans for each population served

To address frustration with internal communication, a 2016 study by an ECU committee for an HLC Quality Initiative proposal recommended the following:

- Make communications more effective by using multiple formats (text, video, photo, etc.)
- Implement a 24/7 texting service for students and employees to ask informational questions
- Create consistent, ADA compliant wayfinding signage in campus buildings

o There is currently no consistent signage identifying departments and room numbers and not all of the existing signage meets ADA standards. Recommendations for outdoor wayfinding signs was addressed in the 2015 ECU Campus Master Plan from Miles & Associates and has been partially implemented, but indoor wayfinding has not been considered.

National Trends

There are two national trends that dictate priorities regarding communications.

Website

- According to a 2017 survey by Ruffalo Noel Levitz, university websites are the top recruitment tool for new students. In fact, 75% of high school seniors state that the website is the most influential resource when searching for colleges.
- The university's website must be redesigned at least every three years to be proactive in keeping up with changes in technology, student expectations, competitors' websites and university needs.
- 28% of people ages 18-29 rely on their smartphone as their only source of Internet (Pew, 2018), making mobile friendly technology critical to meeting students' expectations and needs.

Engagement

- 61% of high school students were open to receive communications from universities via text message (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2017).
- Improved internal communication is not a goal but rather a strategy to achieve employee and student engagement (University of Montana, 2014). Therefore, having personnel dedicated to internal communication is critical to improved customer service and retention of students and employees.
- "Social listening" is the practice of finding out what people are saying about an organization on social media and responding as appropriate. Social listening provides invaluable data about how people perceive ECU and is part of providing excellent customer service (Clark, Fine & Scheuer, 2017; Maben & Gearhart, 2018).

Strategic Themes

The committee recommends the following be included in the strategic plan in order to address the two primary communication issues mentioned above.

Create a clear message of what sets ECU apart from other universities

- **Communication plans:** Create communication plans for each target audience with a clear message consistent with the ECU brand and specified outcomes.
    - o Target audiences include:
        - ▪ Potential students
        - ▪ Current students
        - ▪ Employees
        - ▪ Alumni

- ▪ Donors
- ▪ Ada and surrounding communities
- **Website:** Include $90,000-$300,000 in the university's budget every 3 years to update the website.
- **Social engagement:** Hire a Social Media Specialist to focus on social listening and engage with current and potential students to increase recruitment, retention and brand management.

Improve the communication and user experience of essential processes and procedures

- **Wayfinding signage:** Implement consistent, ADA compliant signage that is easily understandable to new and current students, employees, and visitors. Interactive digital signs would further improve customer service by allowing current and prospective students and visitors to learn what building to go to for each service.
- **Mobile friendly communication:** Implement at 24/7 texting service to answer questions from students and employees. Make the current part-time position in the Switchboard Department to full-time to manage the texting service.
- **Internal Communications Personnel:** Hire an Internal Communications Specialist to improve interdepartmental communications and student and employee engagement. Ensure such individual has appropriate skills, motivation, compensation, resources and autonomy to be successful.
- **New intranet**: Implement a new intranet to facilitate providing information to students and employees in a searchable, mobile-friendly way.

Short and Long Term Plans

The following strategic themes are recommended to complete in the short term (6-12 months):

- Create Communication plans for each target audience
- Hire an Internal Communications Specialist
- Implement consistent, ADA compliant wayfinding signage in campus buildings
- Complete current redesign of website

Strategic themes recommended for the long term (1-5 years) are:

- Implement 24/7 texting service
- Implement new intranet
- Hire a Social Media Specialist
- Redesign the website (3 years from completion of the website currently in production)

Projected Costs

- Intranet: $200,000 every eight years
- Website: $90,000-$300,000 every three years
- Annual investment: $200,788
    - o Texting service: $10,788
    - o Social Media Specialist: $59,000 ($40K salary + benefits)

- o   Internal Communications Specialist: $59,000 ($40K salary + benefits)
- o   Fulltime Call Center: $24,000 (extra $15K for part-time to become fulltime + benefits)

References

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