iREAL – Engagement

Team Members for Question #6:

Pablo Haspel – Committee Chair
Amy Woltman – Director of Orientation
Amanda Garcia – Community Relations Manager, External Relations
Kathy Fitzpatrick – Associate Dean for Graduate Studies, Journalism and Mass Communication
Lori–Ann Cox – Senior Director of Development
Michelle Mason – Associate Dean for Enrollment, Law
Luis Bolanos – Student
Laurel Collin – Professor, Earth and Environment
Sara DuCuennois - Director of Alumni Operations and Programs
Nick Angelo – Former Miami – Dade County Principal
Gisela Casines – Staffer

Question:
How can faculty, staff, students, and the community be thoroughly engaged with changes that are proposed? e.g., continuous use of social media and open forums with live polls for suggestions and feedback. Becoming more community engaged; maintaining a life-long relationship with graduates

Executive Summary

Introduction/Identify the Problem

Introduction

As FIU seeks to continue to develop into a world-class university, it must look at its constituencies to ensure that the connections between them and the university continue to grow and strengthen. Its constituencies are both external and internal. Its internal ones are those that are currently affiliated with the University: students, staff, faculty; those who work at the university, but are not university employees (construction workers, those employed by the businesses around campus); those who are related to the students, staff, and faculty. Its external ones are more extensive, but as important as the internal ones: locally, the South Florida area alumni and their families, employers of our students and alumni, political figures, the private and public schools, our sister colleges and universities, the county and city governments, business and industry; these constituencies are also reflected at the state, national, and international levels. In the survey we conducted, our stakeholders made it clear that engagement is very important to the University.

Therefore, engagement needs to continue to be one of the most important functions for a university. In order to be able to address this very broad topic, the committee came up with a working definition, which guided its discussions: "engagement as a strategy to solve a problem or an opportunity the university can take advantage of." Discussion based on this narrower definition

led to the identification of three major areas where the university is currently either lacking or underutilizing or where an opportunity is currently present. These three major areas are 1) messaging the brand, 2) engaging the community, and 3) technology. None of these are independent of one another, but rather build on the strengths that they possess to improve the overall engagement of the university, both internally and externally. As we look ahead at the challenges higher education in general and FIU specifically face, we must engage with all these constituencies; because of the symbiotic relationship we have with them, we need to engage with them if we are to succeed.

Solutions

1. Messaging the Brand

Branding is one of the most important ways in which the University makes itself known to external audiences. It dictates the message that its members share and, thus, by extension will dictate how this university is viewed in the external community. Although this is an area which the university has improved on since the last strategic plan, much work still needs to be done to improve how the community perceives us, and there are many new opportunities that the university can take advantage of. Below are some specific areas that need to be addressed.

- Need to have a consistent message
    Consistent messaging has to be the most basic of all engagement initiatives. Initiated during the World's Ahead strategic plan, sending out a consistent message must be continued and expanded in future campaigns. Engagement is about having the right message which connects with the public that is trying to be reached. To achieve this goal, all departments/divisions must participate in ensuring that their communications deliver the message in an effective, consistent and clear fashion. To that end, all university materials should have the latest logos in their advertising materials, particularly on their websites. To ensure compliance, the University must not only encourage all its constituencies to comply, but must find the means to ensure that they comply.

    The committee members suggested ways in which the consistency in the message could be improved. We should renew our efforts to share these institutionalized policies with current and new employees. For new employees, the standardized logos should be included as part of new employee orientations, which should also include the external relations resource website with the PowerPoint templates. For current employees, it may be useful to develop an online workshop which can be completed at any time where this information is presented is an organized manner for employees to be able to refer back to in the future.

    We should have guidelines for communicating via email. Although these guidelines should not be as restrictive as those for the logo and similar identifiers, but it should inform departments/divisions of what email communication promoting an event should contain. Currently, emails sent from different departments vary greatly in their look, contributing to a mixed perception of the university's communications. This also leads

to email's being erased without being read due to the vast number of FIU emails sent every day. To have more impactful emails, this policy should address frequency of emails as well, as creating a default look. This departments should be allowed to adapt the look as necessary, but all communications should at least be HTML, not plain text as a minimum.

Lastly, student groups should also have a standardized model to follow like departments currently have in terms of email signature and logos. Student organizations should be provided the external relations resource website during their new club orientations. Many of the events held on campus are done by student groups, who are the face of the University in the community. As such, they need to have flyers which are to some extent professional looking and contained standardized information that is required by the university, such as the disability accommodations that can be provided and the proper logos of cosponsors.

- Get the story out
    There are currently over 200,000 thousand graduates of FIU in the community, with a significant number being located in the tri-county area of Miami-Dade, Broward and Monroe. This vast accumulation of graduates should allow for greater exposure for the university, in the form of simple things such as more FIU tags on cars or decals. This has yet to occur. The University of Miami is immediately associated with Miami, but FIU has yet to be able to garner that sort of name recognition around the country, which can be accomplished by
    o increasing the number of articles in the community, allowing for a better understanding by the citizens of South Florida about what their local public university is doing
    o increasing the intentionality of the location of articles, targeting publications and news providers which could increase the university's exposure more significantly
    o implementing programming targeted at the community which can potentially increase the attachment of the community with the university leading to better word of mouth
    o creating a national FIU day declaration, in which all FIU alumni are asked to wear their school gear/colors on this particular day to raise awareness for the university.

By getting the story of our university, our students, and our faculty out into the community, there can be an increase in the number of donors for the university and the availability of opportunities to our students in the form of internships and job offers.

- Department/division liaison with external relations to inform the community better of our accomplishments
    Currently, many departments/divisions lack the necessary staff to create the necessary public relations. Therefore, newsworthy events do not receive the publicity they deserve. The committee recommends that this become standard policy for the university.
2. **Engaging the community**

The second theme identified by the committee is engagement as an actual activity, by which a greater effort shall be made to engage the community it in a variety of manners in an effort to increase the exposure of the university.

- Improve the current engagement office
  FIU's Office of Engagement is charged with keeping track of all the engagement activities by the university community. However, the website does not facilitate the spread of this information, which makes it difficult for students and community people to find engagement opportunities which are relevant to them.

  > Suggested solution: make a portal on the website which could contain all the current engagement opportunities. This portal could allow viewers to search and locate opportunities of interest to them, raising the awareness about these ventures.

  Furthermore, the office should be the centralized location for all initiatives. It should collect information on the research the faculty is conducting in the community and publicize it. This could raise the awareness of the research, which in turn could lead to further resources being devoted to it.

- Targeted engagement
  There should be a conscious effort by the university to continue targeting its engagement and resources into areas where there are potential returns. Among the 200,000 alumni FIU has are an increasing number of public officials. While not ignoring those who are not FIU alumni, we should target them not only to assist us in obtaining support from the various governmental agencies but to show their support for the university as they meet with their constituencies. We are already seen the positive effects of having Carlos Becerra in Washington; we should have similar representatives at the different levels of government.

  In addition we should visit elected officials in their districts and participate at events that their districts are hosting. We should also be attending culturally significant events around the tri-county area, such as the LGBT parade, The Three Kings, Martin Luther King, and similar parades, and many other events. These sorts of initiatives, which the university has begun to partake in, create relatively high publicity/visibility at a relatively low cost. By having targeted engagement at specific high volume events, the university will be able to increase its exposure, allowing it to reach potential donors, students, and staff, while also showing elected officials and neighboring communities that the university is interested in being a good neighbor and partner.

3. Technology

The world is more interconnected than ever, and, as such, the possibilities for the University to engage with the community and stakeholders in innovative ways are endless. With technology changing so quickly, FIU must be at the forefront of these changes to ensure that we communicate with them in a manner that will keep them engaged with us a variety of modalities. With stakeholders all around the world, the University must be at the forefront of technological Recent technological advances have significantly reduced the costs associated with reaching a wider

audience. This has tremendous implications with what can be done to reach and interact with stakeholders. These opportunities will extend the range of the university's presence and, if properly applied, can continue to make the university worlds ahead. The main question which this section will focus on is how to expand engagement opportunities through technology. We will identify some areas that are currently being addressed and others where the University should begin addressing in an effort to increase its engagement through technology.

- Live engagement
  Technology is now allowing individuals to engage in a conversation regardless of their geographical locations, which allows for new creative forms of participation in events. Currently, a number of departments are hosting live twitter chats as a way to engage their stakeholders. This is an easy and inexpensive way to reach people in their own environments and allowing them to be a part of a dialogue or conversation. Twitter has also been used in the past during events as a way of allowing people to share their opinions as the events transpires, with live twitter feeds being displayed during the event. Furthermore, lectures can incorporate live polling to make it more interactive for the audience present. Live Polling can also be used during town halls meetings and presentations to incorporate the audience and track their opinions, allowing decision makers to have a better understanding about how the audience feels about the topic being discussed.

  The deployment of capturing technologies for online and distance learning classes has meant that a number of rooms around the university have cameras which would allow for lectures and talks in these rooms to be live streamed to audiences worldwide, allowing for alumni to be able to partake in programming initiatives regardless of their geographical location. These cameras would also easily allow for the events to be recorded and uploaded to the internet, allowing for on demand viewing, and the possibility of these events being used for marketing purposes.

- Online Presence
  The FIU main website was updated the last year, and numerous departmental websites followed suit, using a similar design language leading to very similar looks for them. This facilitates navigation for visitors looking for information, since they will be able to find what they are looking for regardless on the actual departmental website that is being visited. However, while many of departments have done so, many others have yet to take this step, and they are left with outdate websites, with poor navigation, outdated information, and broken links. The online presence of an institution has now become its face to the world. With many visitors accessing it daily, university websites need to be attractive and easy to navigate. There should be a more concerted effort to modernize all FIU affiliated websites so that they can be easy to navigate and aesthetically pleasing.

  The number of people who interact with the internet via mobile devices has sky rocketed, and, therefore, all the websites should be optimized for mobile browsing. Furthermore, the FIU application for smart phones should continue to be optimized and updated to include innovative features, which would ideally be built into the application as opposed to launching the browser. New features to include could potentially be an improved calendar

tracker which would show all events taking place on campus and the option to add money to the onecard directly from the application.

Lastly, the university currently uses orgsync as its system for all communications for Greek organizations, student clubs, and some other Student Affairs departments. This system is not very useful for students who do not know what type of club they want to join, as it relies primarily on the individual searching for what s/he wants. Furthermore, in many cases the clubs have to authorize a student joining the group before the student can see what the club is about. Many groups do not keep their pages updated, thereby limiting its value to those who are seeking information about them. The platform is not well marketed, so many of the students on campus are not aware of it. A better system for the student clubs should be implemented or developed that would be better marketed and more user friendly to our students.

- Online Educational Tools
  Online classes and offerings should be increased. These classes should rely on easy to adopt broad technologies which are easy for the students to access and for the faculty to create content for. Currently, the university uses a variety of systems, including Adobe Connect and Blackboard. These systems are easy for students and should continue to be used while they are relevant. Certain classes are currently recorded, allowing students to review and access the content on demand. This program should be expanded to many other classes so that students can review the lectures and increase their exposure to the material. Online classes should try to become more personable, so that individuals taking them can feel as though they are still part of the university community and part of a real class.

Conclusion

As we begin to craft the next strategic plan, we need to keep at the forefront the importance of continuing to engage our stakeholders. As higher education faces increasing challenges and needs to address them, we need to continue engaging our many stakeholders by presenting consistent branding, continuing to engage the FIU community at large, and using technology in meaningful ways.