

**Fitchburg State University**  
**Strategic Planning White Paper**  
**Marketing and Admissions Working Group**  
**November 15, 2014**

**Working Group Members:** Dr. Michael Greenwood, Professor, Businesses Department (Chair); Dr. Mary Baker, Assistant Professor, Communications Media Department; Dr. Lynne Kellner, Professor, Behavioral Sciences; Jessica Murdoch, Assistant Vice President for Human Resources and Payroll Services; James Roger, Director Auxiliary Services; Jennifer Trocquet (student representative)

**I. Marketing and Admissions Working Group Charge**

This Working Group of the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) was responsible for addressing the challenges and opportunities related to Fitchburg State University's current and future initiatives for presenting the University's brand to its stakeholders (e.g. alumni, donors, government personnel, students, faculty, administration, staff, community partners, and prospective students and their parents).

The marketing questions given to the Working Group were categorized into six higher education marketing activity focus area(s):

- **Align:** Alignment with University governance, messaging, etc.
- **Attract:** Efforts to identify and attract qualified candidates that fit within the University target market.
- **Engage:** Actions the University may take to involve qualified candidates in an active review and decision process.
- **Transact:** The process or methods used to enroll and register enrolled students. Can include any student touch point with the University.
- **Retain:** Activities that support the attainment of student retention and graduation rate objectives.
- **Link:** Marketing communications that include but are not limited to social media that result in targeted communications to candidates and enrolled students.

It should be noted that the Working Group's charge did not include operational decisions or recommendations, such as determining a slogan or specific marketing strategies for the University.

## **II. Working Group Process**

The Working Group met on the following dates; May 22, June 5, July 16, August 20, September 24, October 15, October 29. One meeting is scheduled for November 12. All meetings notices and minutes were posted on the Fitchburg State University web site.

To better understand current marketing and admissions practices, several key staff members who are responsible for various aspects of marketing at the University attended meetings. This included staff members from External Affairs, Admissions, Public Relations, IT, Print Services, Alumni and Development, Graduate and Continuing Education, and CenterStage. Each of these offices provided the committee with an overview of current marketing and admissions practices at the University as well as a detailed audit of the marketing communication functions of each office.

The Working Group also investigated and compared the marketing functions/outcomes of comparable colleges and universities, with particular emphasis on Fitchburg State's sister institutions in the Massachusetts State University system.

## **III. Working Group Findings**

In examining marketing structures at several of Fitchburg State's sister institutions in the Massachusetts State University system, the Working Group found that Bridgewater State, Framingham State, Salem State, Westfield State, and Worcester State all have formalized marketing or marketing and communications offices or departments. Each of these marketing offices or departments have a dedicated marketing staff member at the director level or above along with support staff to serve the marketing needs of their entire universities.

The current marketing structure at Fitchburg State is somewhat untraditional. Key staff members from several offices, including External Affairs, Admissions, Public Relations, Alumni and Development, Graduate and Continuing Education, IT, Print Services, and CenterStage comprise a Marketing Committee. While short-term marketing projects are undertaken on a regular basis by these offices, the Marketing Committee is charged with overall planning and execution of major projects. Team members craft individual messages, with assistance from the larger group when required. Delivery often includes a combination of systems, such as email, web, newsletters, publications, and media. There is only one full-time marketing staff member at the University, a Director of Marketing for Graduate and Continuing Education. There is no equivalent position for the Undergraduate Day program or for the University as a whole. The members of the Marketing Committee who serve the Undergraduate Day program and/or the University as a whole have marketing as one component of their job description, in addition to other responsibilities.

The Working Group's most significant finding is that the decentralized, committee-based approach to marketing at Fitchburg State is problematic. Despite solid work by individual members of the Marketing Committee, the overall message, identity, and branding of the

University is neither integrated nor consistent across all communication channels. Current marketing efforts at the University are disjointed. No one office “owns” the overall message or brand for the University or serves as a hub to collect and distribute marketing and admissions research data. This was cited several times by members of the Marketing Committee as a barrier to doing their jobs more effectively. Different offices at the University carry out separate marketing projects. Although the Marketing Committee members communicate with each other on a regular basis, there have been instances in which marketing opportunities were missed because one office was not fully aware of a marketing project that was being undertaken by another office.

The problematic nature of this decentralized, committee-based approach to marketing is further exemplified by one of the discussion questions the Working Group was asked to consider, “*How does Fitchburg State differentiate itself from other institutions with similar missions, locations, and price points...*”. While the members of the Marketing Committee are keenly aware of the importance of differentiating Fitchburg State from other universities in order to recruit and retain the best students and some work has been done with regards to the website, little progress has been made in terms of developing a unique identity or brand for the University as a whole. No one office or staff member is empowered to develop a singular identity for the University. Likewise, the members of the Marketing Committee have too many other job responsibilities to take on the task of determining and managing a comprehensive and integrated marketing strategy for the entire University.

#### **IV. Working Group Recommendations**

The Working Group strongly recommends a more formalized and centralized approach to marketing and communications at the University. Below are specific recommendations in short term, mid term, and long term that would allow this to be accomplished.

##### **A. Short Term**

The Working Group recommends a centralized decision-maker or point person be identified to lead all marketing and communication efforts at the University. This individual should be tasked with this as his/her sole job function, not added to other responsibilities. This person should be accountable and empowered to accomplish the following:

- Oversee activities with an aim at creating a fully integrated, cohesive and consistent marketing message across all offices and departments at the University
- Manage the identity and brand of the University
- Align marketing efforts with the University’s Strategic Plan
- Function as a hub for collecting and distributing market research and admissions data, with specific attention to future market identification such as Hispanic populations, veterans, adults, and non-degree completers
- Provide oversight of the University’s website design as well as digital marketing and social media strategies

- Ensure marketing efforts are reflective of the diversity of the University community
- Provide marketing training and education to ensure adherence to standard procedures and policies across all offices and departments at the University

Again, it should be noted that it is beyond the scope of the Working Group to determine the exact operational organization of staff or propose job titles.

### B. Mid Term

At this stage, the Working Group recommends that an audit of current marketing and communications procedures be conducted to identify challenges, deficiencies, and redundancies in the current system. Likewise, the utility and current framework of the Marketing Committee should be evaluated. Clear channels of communications should be established and training made available to staff, faculty, and students regarding the University's marketing objectives, procedures, standards, and formats. Finally, marketing analysis and data should begin to be gathered in preparation for developing a long term marketing strategy for the University.

### C. Long Term

At this stage, the Working Group recommends the University's core brand identity be evaluated in order to develop a cohesive, integrated, long-term marketing and communications plan consistent across all offices/department that speaks to all constituents. This plan should include an emphasis on supporting enrollment goals, Academic programs, and the goals of the Strategic Plan. In addition, conducting ongoing research and analysis to inform and enhance the marketing communications and admissions efforts at the University should be a priority.