2014 WVU Competitive Assessment_Admission site/communication_Widmeyer

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WVU Competitor Analysis

Review of Admissions Sites & Communications Materials
7.10.2014
The Assignment:

WVU was compared to other selective schools regarding how audiences might perceive each institution and how clearly and consistently they communicate a unique brand image through multiple audience touch points.
Virtually all schools in this competitive set offer a similar message with respect to excellence in facilities, faculty, and alumni.

Key decision driver—especially with last minute “gut” decision-makers.
Homepage: Texas A&M

Brand Essence:
“One really, really big family”
- No specific tagline on homepage.
- Scrolling photos with links for associated articles:
  - **Healthy – South Texas** (Texas A&M Institute for Public Health Improvement launches “Healthy Texas” initiative)
  - **Transforming Indonesia** (Norman Bourlag Institute for International Agriculture at Texas A&M is combating hunger and poverty in Indonesia)
  - **Spreading Democracy** (Texas A&M University President supports aiding Iraqi people)
  - **Still Thirsty** (John Nielsen-Gammon, professor of atmospheric sciences at Texas A&M and State Climatologist, discusses drought conditions in Texas)
- Visual theme, white and brown colors, are consistent throughout most of the website pages.
Admissions: Texas A&M

- Overall, the website messaging for admissions is focused on the size of the school and the rational reasons – facts and figures – for choosing this school instead of integrating emotional aspects.

- Navigation layout is efficient in directing prospective students to the specific information they seek.

- Visual theme and navigation layout is consistent throughout links for admissions (except for “Visitors”).
Recruiting Materials: Texas A&M

- 12-minute online video of still photos and voiceovers instructs potential students on how to submit an application package.
- Photos do not match up well with the voiceover topics.
- Viewbook photos emphasize diversity in the student body.
- Viewbook is balanced with emotional reasons for choosing the school that are not apparent on the website.
- Viewbook does a good job of depicting high energy and portrays the school’s academic programs as exciting and rewarding.
Course Catalog: Texas A&M

- Course catalog cover page features Corps of Cadets.
- Catalog cover is not consistent with other recruiting messages, such as the size of the school, the breadth of academics, or student diversity.
Homepage: Virginia Tech

Brand Essence:
“Create your future”

• The main tagline is “Invent the Future,” but more personalized versions appear throughout the materials, such as “Embrace your future” and “Invent your future.”

• Scrolling areas of emphasis (“spotlights”) include freshman orientation, “Impact” on the community, student “Achievement,” and “innovation.”

• Vertically extended homepage includes 4 major areas:
  • Areas of spotlight
  • News & Events
  • Life at Virginia Tech
  • Learn at Virginia Tech (academics)
Continuing the “Future” theme, the Admissions landing page emphasizes student achievement:

“At Virginia Tech, we know that our students are special. Here, our students imagine the next great thing, and then they do it.”

This is accompanied by a rather unremarkable photo of students in class starring at their laptops.

Otherwise the page is sparse, with a list of links for additional information.
Recruiting Materials: Virginia Tech

• The undergraduate landing page is extremely long (over 20 screens), covering 7 subject areas that replicate the navigation tabs at the top. The effect is like a run-on sentence.

• No online viewbook was found, but printed recruitment materials are text-heavy with small photos building on the “Embrace your future” theme with tabs for the following:
  • Explore Virginia Tech
  • Expand your intellect
  • See for yourself (visiting)
  • Embracing your future
Course Catalog: Virginia Tech

- The online course catalog is virtually all text, other than two uninspired landscape photos on the landing page.
- Each link takes the viewer to text-heavy pages in extremely small print.
- While this approach gives the impression that everything a student would ever need to know is contained therein, there is nothing within the document that would compel readers to review it. The take-away is that VA Tech courses are very dry.
Homepage: Oklahoma State University

Brand Essence:
“Your home away from home”

- Tagline: America’s Brightest Orange.
- Slowly scrolling photos:
  - Thank You (Story on veteran turned student)
  - Fireworks Safety (Learn to use fireworks safely)
  - Filling the Skills Gap (Focus on Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology)
- Summer Pool Safety (Basic safety tips)

- Visual theme, orange, gray black, and white colors, consistent throughout most of the website.
Admissions: Oklahoma State University

- Busy but welcoming Admissions website page.
- Navigation layout is effective and easy to use.
- Admissions landing page presents very little information on academics or the specialties of the school.
- Each major link sends the user to a well-designed summary page that also includes a student testimonial focusing on the brand essence.
Recruiting Materials: Oklahoma State University

- Font size on the Application viewbook cover page is extremely small.
- Colors are vibrant throughout, emphasizing the school’s orange.
- PDF file is not well designed for electronic viewing.
- Because it obviously was designed for hard copy, major concept statements are split up on to different screens.
Recruiting Materials: Oklahoma State University

- High School viewbook is brief (8 pages) and focuses on the “home away from home” theme and athletics.
- Cover page is very plain, dominated by black color.
Course Catalog: Oklahoma State University

- Students are absent on Course catalog cover.
- “Home away from home” theme is not captured on the course catalog cover.
Brand Essence:
“Penn State has a large circle of influence”

• Driven by a large visual presence, the homepage includes the tagline, “PENN STATE LIVES HERE,” on photos that take visitors to in-depth articles on various aspects of Penn State’s sphere of influence.

• At the time of review, the homepage was focused on Independence Day celebrations, the Immersive Construction Lab, nonprofit work, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)....all tied to the them, “Penn State Lives Here.”
Admissions: Pennsylvania State University

- Continuing the highly visual presentation, the Admissions landing page consists of a series of thematic photos leading to more information on the following areas:
  - Undergraduate
  - Graduate
  - Online
  - Law
  - Medicine
  - Continuing Education

- Each photo emphasizes smiling, vibrant individuals, most of whom are looking directly at the camera.

- Emphasizing the pragmatic, the page informs the visitor that “Our students learn from classes, internships, research, and more, graduating workforce ready.”
Recruiting Materials: Pennsylvania State University

- Penn State does a good job of integrating visually-appealing illustrations with factual information.

- Separate online brochures are available for 9 subject areas related to academic programs and finances.

- The viewbook reads like an online magazine of articles, with plenty of visuals and quotes from students. All-in-all, it makes for inviting and interesting reading.

- Dominating throughout is the Penn State blue.
The Schedule of Courses offers an advanced online search page that allows the visitor to narrow their course search by specific criteria; including subject area, semester date, campus location, type of course, etc.

A clean, visually appealing blue color palette is used throughout.
Homepage: Michigan State University

Brand Essence:
“When you’re a Spartan you belong”

- No tagline on homepage.
- Scrolling photos with links for stories:
  - Meet Jolisa Brooks: Junior, Detroit, Michigan – Inside Out: An in-depth look at the MSU student experience
  - Plan Bee: Helping secure the nation’s supply
  - Custom-Made for Success
- Visual theme, green and white colors, consistent throughout the website.
Admissions: Michigan State University

- Admissions landing page contains little information compared to other schools.
- 9 captioned photos to examine on the Admissions landing page:
  - STUDY ABROAD on any continent
  - CHOOSE from more than 200 majors
  - EXPLORE a small-college experience in a residential college
  - FEEL AT HOME in one of 25 residence halls
  - CHEER ON THE SPARTANS in 25 varsity sports
  - CHANGE YOUR LIFE and change the world
  - WORK alongside world-class faculty
  - PLAY in one of the nation’s largest intramural and club sports programs
  - ENJOY fresh, creative cuisine in one of 14 campus dining halls
- The “Experience MSU” links (Videos, Photos, Sagas, Maps) work hard at inspiring potential students to apply
- Potential students need to click quite a few times to get to usable application/information links.
Recruiting Materials: Michigan State University

- Freshman viewbook photos emphasize diversity in the student body.
- Viewbook is balanced with emotional reasons for choosing the school that are not apparent on the website.
- Viewbook does a good job of depicting high energy and portrays the school’s academic programs as exciting and rewarding.
• Traditional course catalog (e.g., in PDF form) are not available online.

• Course catalog landing page and links contain information only – no graphics or messaging.
Homepage: Ohio State University

Brand Essence:
“Ohio State is multifaceted”

• Not really a tagline, the homepage offers the rhetorical question, “What does Ohio State mean to you?” in the banner.

• Marquee photos emphasize the new President, community outreach, and freshman orientation

• Despite the inclusion of two videos (engineering innovation and a “Buckeye Moment” about forming lasting relationships with fellow students), the homepage is on the dull side.
In addition to a list of links for relevant topics, the general admissions landing page continues the “Buckeye Moments” theme with three videos of students that share their own, personal “Buckeye Moments:”

- Fitting in on campus
- Helping prison inmates
- The rewards of getting involved on campus

The net effect is a very approachable school, despite it’s extremely large size with 42,000 undergraduates.
Recruiting Materials: Ohio State University

- While the freshman admissions page is all text, it includes an invitation to “Build your own Ohio State” by choosing majors, activities “and more” for “your personalized viewbook.”

- Printed materials feature the headline, “This is Ohio State” with photos of students all over the world, each showing a group of four with their arms upraised to form the letters O-H-I-O.

Ample photos show students happily enjoying campus life with assurances that “You’ll fit in here,” but it is noteworthy that only one photo shows snow on the ground.
Course Catalog: Ohio State University

- The online course catalog is more versatile than it initially appears, by including the following:
  - Links to standard listings of courses and a wide variety of related topics
  - An advanced online search page that allows visitors to find a specific course or class through search criteria; including subject area, campus location, type of course, etc.
Homepage: North Carolina State University

Brand Essence:
“We do research”

- No tagline on homepage.
- Vertically extended page requires scrolling through 3 screens to view all of homepage.
- Numerous links and large navigation options present the user with well-organized links.
- Scrolling photos with links for stories:
  - CAREER READY: NC State graduates have the experience and skills employers seek
  - RETURN OF THE NATIVE: With help from NC State researchers, Pinehurst #2 returns to its roots for two U.S. Opens
  - A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION: NC State junior Tyson Huffman is helping Rwandans manufacture an affordable, effective sanitary pad
  - A MAKER’S PLACE: NC State students show how they make and do at Maker Faire
- Visual theme, red, white, and gray colors (with occasional black used for highlighting) are consistent throughout the website.
Admissions: North Carolina State University

- Vertically extended landing page requires 3 ½ screens to view all of Admissions homepage.
- Links are well-organized and helpful.
- The undergraduate “Learn more” link takes the user to the Undergraduate Admissions landing page that encourages prospective students with highlighted messages to explore, visit, connect, join, plan, etc.
Recruiting Materials: North Carolina State University

• Viewbook of 28 “pages” is designed specifically for online viewing.

• Most pages are large color photos of diverse students, with captions and/or text boxes.

• Photos highlight technology and applied research.

• Most links in the viewbook take the user to the Undergraduate Admissions landing page.
Course Catalog: North Carolina State University

• Landing page for the Undergraduate Course Catalog is a list of all programs, as seen in the top graphic.

• Clicking on a program link maintains interest in the course listings with student photos, as seen in the bottom graphic.
Homepage: University of Kentucky

Brand Essence:
“\textit{If you can see it, you can achieve it}”

- The tagline, “See Blue,” is a nice idea that plays off the school colors, but it is not prominently displayed.

- In an effort to create interest through motion, the marquee photos on the homepage not only scroll, but also zoom out. The effect is reminiscent of a home slide show via computer.

- The main themes are:
  - Student achievement
  - Cutting edge discovery
  - Lexington
  - Student opportunities
  - Service/ outreach
  - State-of-the-art facilities
Admissions: University of Kentucky

• The Admissions landing page primarily offers visitors 4 choices:
  • Apply
  • Visit
  • Majors
  • “Preview Nights” (2013)

• However, the scrolling banner has an extremely long list of topics (18), including stories from students and successful alumni; as well as information about their academic programs.
Recruiting Materials: University of Kentucky

• The viewbook banner has the same 18 scrolling stories as the Admissions page, but it also offers a more traditional 20-page viewbook with ample graphics and visually-pleasing pages.

• However, it is light on detailed information, and the predominant blue background makes some pages difficult to read.

• All-in-all, the viewbook looks nice but only provides information in broad strokes that would be of limited use to serious students.
Course Catalog: University of Kentucky

- The course catalog offers a rudimentary online search page that allows visitors to find a specific course through basic search criteria.

- There also is a Bulletin/ Course Catalog that offers links to an exhaustive list of topics including admission requirements, fees, financial aid, living accommodations, course offerings by the various colleges, course descriptions, etc.
Homepage: Syracuse University

Brand Essence:
“Celebrating Urban Culture”

- No tagline on homepage.
- Vertically extended page requires scrolling through 3 screens to view all of homepage.
- User is motivated to use top left navigational links, but lack of visual appeal harms user motivation to study the remainder of the homepage.
- Scrolling photos do not include links or captions.
- Visual theme, orange, white, and gray colors, are consistent throughout the website.
Admissions: Syracuse University

- Somewhat sparse admissions landing page has scrolling photos and helpful links.
- Easy to navigate to more detailed pages on undergraduate, graduate, part time, and veteran’s admission processes.
- Undergraduate admissions page is unfocused, but links are not difficult to find.
- Brief videos of current students’ reasons for choosing Syracuse University focus on the emotional reasons for the choice.
Recruiting Materials: Syracuse University

- Viewbook of 24 pages has been taken from a print version and is not well-designed for online viewing.
  - Print is too small to read without magnification (which is accomplished with a single click).
  - Photography of the viewbook clearly shows the brochure’s internal gutter on the webpage.
- Photos work hard at showing student body diversity and the school’s urban setting.
- The brand essence of urban culture is not portrayed in the viewbook.
Course Catalog: Syracuse University

- Online course catalog features a photo of the Vice Chancellor and Provost instead of students or campus settings.
- Each of the “Schools and Colleges” landing page features a photo of the dean of that school, but no students or campus settings.
- Some links on pages may take the user to the individual schools’ website (many of which are not visually consistent with the overall Syracuse University website theme).
Homepage: University of Maryland

Brand Essence: “Empowering Maryland”

- The unexplained tagline, “MPOWERING THE STATE,” is found at the bottom of the homepage.

- It appears that an old website template was used, with a very basic design that is virtually all small-font text other than scrolling marquee photos that emphasize sports, summer education, wine, recycling, and living with cancer.

- The real estate is divided into blocks devoted to “In the news,” “Discover Maryland A-Z,” and links to a variety of online communities and feeds.
Admissions: University of Maryland

• With a very generic “Imagine the Possibilities” headline, the Admissions landing page is dominated by three large photos that appear to communicate the essence of the U of M community:
  • Main library
  • Energy efficiency engineering expertise
  • School mascot.

• Oddly, links to the 5-step admissions process are given very little real estate:
  1. Admission Requirements
  2. Visit
  3. Apply
  4. Financial aid/ Scholarships
  5. Enroll
Recruiting Materials: University of Maryland

• Continuing the lack of marketing effort that is seen in other U of M materials, a list of links for Campus Resources appears to serve as the school’s viewbook for undergraduates...offering assurances that,

  “The University of Maryland offers all the technology and services you need for your academic journey.”

• Even the Visit landing page only has the hastily scribed words, “We can’t wait to meet you!” as its main welcoming message.
Course Catalog: University of Maryland

- The undergraduate course catalog is a 1,024 page document that is devoid of any photos or illustrations.
- Even the cover, seen at left, is an amazing study in the generic presentation of basic information.
- Adding to the sense of density, many paragraphs in the document are not separated by any white space. No effort has been extended to make this information approachable or even interesting.
Homepage: West Virginia University

Brand Essence: “The sky’s the limit”

• No tagline on homepage (“Find Your Focus” is highlighted on the Viewbook cover and in the school’s video commercial).

• Though it is meant to showcase technical achievement, the meaning of the large homepage graphic is somewhat obscure – requires reading the fine print.

• Photo links on the homepage highlight the following:
  • Achievements of the WVU robotics team (pictured)
  • Adventures of the WVU Soar participants in the Rocky Mountains and desert Southwest
  • WVU President Gordon Lee’s tour of 55 West Virginia counties
  • WVU’s historic architecture and an invitation to visit campus
  • A vignette of WVU graduate Kendal Montgomery’s career in Santiago, Chile, including a brief video

• The blue and gold colors are consistent throughout the website, but visuals of a blue sky are more graphically apparent.
Admissions: West Virginia University

• Large print and the blue and gold font colors are helpful in directing prospective students to the information they need.

• Admissions page and links are very clear and factual.

• From the Admissions page, it is difficult to get to more subjective information, such as characteristics the admissions committee is looking for in student applicants or the more emotional rewards of attending the school.
Recruiting Materials: West Virginia University

- Viewbook: Odd cover, but it does reinforce the point to “Find Your Focus.”
- Could not find the viewbook from the WVU website.
- Viewbook was not designed for onscreen viewing – print is too small.
- Good messaging within the viewbook, highlighting students’ achievements and opportunities.
Recruiting Materials: West Virginia University

- **About WVU** links (which start with *WE ARE PIONEERING*) nicely present the emotional rewards of attending the school.

- Links to **About WVU** are only available from three major webpages – the homepage, the Current Students page, and the Staff page.
Course Catalog: West Virginia University

- Onscreen course catalog cover is very plain and does not take advantage of the opportunity to use it as a marketing tool.
- Color photos of students and well-written descriptions start each catalog section.