

[Organization] Logo

**2021 Communications Strategy**

October 5, 2020

[Organization]

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

# 2021 COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

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# 2021 COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

## Introduction

This document presents a detailed plan to meet the challenges of increasing awareness, fostering engagement, and ensuring Federal compliance. The challenges are viewed in the context of the current national, state, and higher education environments. Solutions advance [Organization] and departmental goals related to identified key audiences. Key audiences include prospective students and families, policy makers, the [Organization]'s constituents, and the media.

## Communications Office Mission

The mission of the [Organization] is to discover, create, transmit, and apply knowledge to address the needs of individuals and society.

In support of that overall mission, the mission of the communications department is to

- Advance and defend the [Organization]'s brand and reputation.
- Help drive awareness and understanding of the System's Strategic Plan.
- Lead a community of practice for all communicators across the [Organization].
- Create greater public awareness, understanding, and support from policymakers, legislators, and NC citizens.

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## Situation Analysis

### Environment

#### Demographics<sup>1,2,5,6</sup>

According to the U.S. Census data, the population of N.C. has increased by 10% over the past 10 years (2010 vs. 2019). NC residents are primarily white (70%). Languages (in order of preference) are English and Spanish (~7%). All other languages account for <1% of population and digital traffic. The number of Spanish speaking families is projected to grow since the Hispanic population grew 1,114% from 1990-2016. Multicultural families will continue to increase. From 1980 to 2008, the number of multi-race marriages increased to 14%.

In higher education, the US's declining birthrate is causing declining enrollments and more diversity among applicants. Reports show that 61% of students are not full-time students ages 18-22, many are already in the workforce, and many are contending with childcare. Since colleges rely heavily on tuition and even small changes can have big effects, states with smaller colleges and a higher percentage of rural populations are seeing closures (e.g., Vermont and Iowa). With smaller and more diverse applicant populations, institutions are competing more for undergraduates. Student surveys indicate feelings of diversity and inclusion will be key to the success of the student and the [subsidiaries]. A larger proportion of postsecondary students are from traditionally underserved groups and disproportionately affected by the recession and associated problems (access, food insecurity, homelessness).

#### Economic<sup>2,5</sup>

Nationally, the U.S. economy bounced back stronger than expected after the initial onslaught of the coronavirus and recovered almost half of the 22 million jobs lost. The remaining jobs are expected to be more difficult to replace. Labor market conditions remain quite strong for [the state] as a whole, but recovery from the recession is very uneven across the state.

In higher education, many institutions face financial uncertainty and think alternative pathways, online learning, and workforce preparation will be key to success. Schools are developing alternative pathways (micro-degrees, nano-degrees, stackable certificates) and aggressively marketing them to potential graduate students. Many colleges are attempting to close the perceived divide between liberal arts education and workforce preparation. Colleges across the nation are attempting to create an institution culture that does not support an "either-or" proposition of liberal education and workforce development, but rather one that embraces the "both-and" mentality to human and technical skills. Many student populations are perpetually seeking employment or career advancement, and 70% of students say their institutions do not provide a student community to connect with alumni.

#### Technology<sup>3,4,5,6</sup>

In higher education, remote and online learning is more important than ever. Technology learning curves challenge faculty and students, many of whom are underserved and part-time. Issues like the high cost of technology, limited high-speed internet in [the state], and the recession make the challenge even more difficult for underserved populations.

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Students now expect a seamless digital college experience similar to the seamless experience they have in their everyday lives but few receive it. For example, 36% of students want tailored SMS/text reminders about important deadlines, yet only 20% actually receive these types of reminders.

No significant changes for the website are expected. Users have accessed the website using desktop (80%) and mobile for the past three years. Browsers may change since Google's Chrome browser has lost 2% of traffic, Firefox has lost 8% while Apple's Safari (in-App) increased 86%. Apple's Safari (In-App) is used by apps to load webpages. With the new website, we anticipate better understanding of our digital consumer through better tracking and analytics. Regarding website content and information architecture, 82% of students say an easy-to-navigate website with helpful information influenced their decision to apply.

### Political <sup>2</sup>

Continued changes are expected. Voter registrations are outpacing 2016 despite pandemic. As a result, the political climate in [the state] could change dramatically.

### Social Forces <sup>4</sup>

Socially, there is a huge amount of churn. Nationally and locally, social movements such as Black Lives Matter, political discussions in relation to the election cycle, and isolation are common conversation drivers. According to social media, North Carolinians seem to be primarily concerned with institution leadership, [Organization]'s leadership, and social justice.

<sup>1</sup> US Census data

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncdemography.org/>

<sup>3</sup> Google Analytics

<sup>4</sup> Facebook and Twitter analytics  
(SalesForce.org)

<sup>5</sup> 2020 EDUCAUSE Horizon Report

<sup>6</sup> Connected Student Report

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### Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><b>Communications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Team has a deep skillset</li> <li>● We have an articulated value proposition for each of our audiences</li> <li>● Regularly generate interesting content</li> <li>● Users spend long times on page(s)</li> <li>● Provide valuable information</li> </ul> <p><b>Organization and Constituents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide valuable information</li> <li>● Institution recognition</li> <li>● Services we provide to the community</li> </ul>	<p><b>Communications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reactionary</li> <li>● Evolving strategies</li> <li>● Disagreement on whom we serve</li> <li>● Shallow team with no redundancy</li> </ul> <p><b>Organization and Constituents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Constantly evolving teams with new processes</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<p><b>Communications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Active online audiences</li> <li>● Staff training</li> <li>● Untapped audiences</li> <li>● Social interaction</li> <li>● Utilize new toolsets</li> <li>● Desire for Alumni Connections</li> </ul>	<p><b>Internal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Turnover</li> <li>● [Subsidiary] confusion about points of contact</li> <li>● Silos</li> </ul> <p><b>External</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Controversy</li> <li>● Negative press</li> <li>● Media noise</li> <li>● Brand confusion with [Subsidiary]</li> <li>● State and/or Federal policy changes</li> <li>● Smaller student populations</li> </ul>

### Unique Opportunities

- The COVID-19 quarantine has energized homebound online communities. The [organization] has a unique **opportunity to interact with online communities** through content, conversations, and promotion.

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- New tools are ready (website A/B testing, MailChimp texting and tracking, and Google Data Dashboards), but staff lacks training to effectively utilize them. **Training staff on new tools** should be a priority.
- A rising [state] Spanish speaking population indicates we should develop **Spanish language materials** to accommodate non-English speaking constituents (parents of potential students).
- Data shows students desire professional connections with alumni. To address this need, we should develop messaging helping job seeking **students and alumni connect with alumni**.

### Challenges

During the coming year, challenges will include:

- Developing flexible plans during leadership changes and changing priorities
- Clarifying the role of the [Organization]
- Distinguishing the [Organization] brand from the [subsidiaries'] brands
- Countering or rising above negative media coverage
- Working within shrinking budgets while advancing [organization] and departmental goals

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## Priority Audiences

In the past, leadership defined four primary audiences: prospective students and families, legislators and policy makers, [subsidiaries], and the media. For the 2018 website redesign, [an outside contractor] developed messaging guidelines for each audience.

### Future Students and Families

Students and families look to the [Organization]'s digital properties for news, application information, and to research programs and classes. They visit the website, consume email and social media like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

#### Desired Action

- We would like future students and families to have a positive opinion of the [Organization].
- We would like them to interact with our social media channels in positive ways.
- We would like them to be brand ambassadors.

#### Messaging Guidelines

- Messages should be direct and to-the-point, since students want to get in and out quickly.
- Students enjoy personalized messages; ex., seeing their name in a newsletter.
- Students and parents value inclusive messages that offer a sense of belonging.
- Imagery should be energetic and show diverse groups having fun in unique, attractive settings.
- Faculty like to see their institution referenced, but dislike seeing other institutions shown more prominently. Make an effort to include all [constituents], every time.
- Imagery must be high quality and have appropriate licensing.
- Students' and families' digital experiences should be seamless; ex., avoid multiple logins or redirects to other pages.

### Legislators and Policy makers

This audience comes to the [Organization] website to download meeting materials and for news. They visit the website, consume email, blogs, and social media like Twitter and LinkedIn.

#### Desired Action

- We want legislators and policy makers to have a positive opinion of the [Organization].
- We would like them to interact with our social media channels in positive ways.
- We would like them to be brand ambassadors.

#### Messaging Guidelines

- This audience wants to understand the effects the System has on his/her district.
- They often want specific information, such as impact and accomplishment information, contact information, justification of tax dollars, etc.
- They need facts and information to communicate to their representatives about System performance.



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- Imagery should be direct and concise (e.g., infographics).
- All imagery should be high quality and have appropriate licensing.
- The digital experience should be seamless for all audiences; ex., avoid multiple logins or redirects to other pages.

### [Subsidiary] Communities

This priority audience visits the [Organization]'s digital properties to research programs and classes. They visit the website, consume newsletters, and interact on social media like Facebook, Instagram, and newsletters.

#### Desired Action

- The [Organization] would like this audience to help differentiate brands through individual mentions and cross promotions.
- We would like them to interact with our social media channels in positive ways.

#### Messaging Guidelines

- Faculty and staff often need to know HR information quickly. Messages should be brief and use few acronyms.
- [Subsidiary] members want to see his/her parent institution represented equally (or prominently). Please include multiple institutions in stories if possible.
- All imagery should be high quality and have appropriate licensing.
- Imagery used in [Organization] materials should reference more than one institution to avoid the implication of favoritism.
- The digital experience should be seamless for all audiences; ex., avoid multiple logins or redirects to other pages.

### Media

The media visits the website to submit requests, download media assets, and get news. The media generates primarily direct traffic for downloads and direct communications.

#### Desired Action

- When possible, we would like the news teams to show the [Organization] and constituents in a positive light.
- We would like them to interact with our social media channels in positive ways.
- We would also like them to be brand ambassadors.

#### Messaging Guidelines

- The media looks to the [Organization] to get the System's positions on hotbed issues. Messages should be reviewed by Communications before release.
- Imagery should be high quality, within media organization's specs and have appropriate licensing.
- The media often seek contact information for relevant people for questions. Be sure to include contact information in the event of follow-up questions.

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### Goal: Increase Web Traffic

Objectives: Increase overall web traffic by 10% within 6 months.

Supporting Strategic Directives: Universal goal, Increase Awareness of the Website and [Organization], Foster Engagement.

### Tactics for Consideration

After approval, tactics will have goals, owners, and timeline.

### Feature Story Analytics Reports

- Weekly reports will detail feature story engagement on the website and social media.
- Reports will include
  - Title and link to original story.
  - Original publication date.
  - Page views (total and percent of total).
  - Referrers in order of the amount of traffic they sent to the site with stats (impressions, engagements, likes, shares, comments, etc.).
  - Estimated read time compared to average time spent on page.
- Measurement: Feedback

### SEO (External) training

- Comms team and content creators will learn how to balance ongoing ADA compliance, links, search engine optimization, messaging guidelines, and content appeal.
- Measurement: Feedback, analytics

### Google Analytics training

- The comms team will learn to read and understand Google Analytics reports.
- Measurement: Feedback

### Link building campaign

- To utilize Google's web crawling and generate web traffic, feature stories should be optimized to include strategic keywords.
- Measurement: Google Analytics, Google Custom Search Engine

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### Editorial Calendar

These routine promotion opportunities should be integrated into the shared Comms Calendar. Additional events will be discussed and possibly added to the shared Communications Calendar.

### Events for Consideration

Subject	Institution(s)	Date	Repeats
[Removed] Announcement	[Organization]	November	Yes
[Removed] Award	[Organization]	May	Yes
[Removed] Awards	All	April	Yes
Scholar Announcement	[Organization]	May	Yes
Summer Activities		Summer	Yes
Welcome Back Students			Yes
FAFSA Applications	[Organization]	June	Yes
BOG Meetings	[Removed]	Bi-Monthly	Yes
Presidential Anniversary	President's Office		
Chancellor Installation			
Cheatham-White Announcement	[Organization]	April	
New Hire Announcements	[Organization]		
William Hearst STEM Scholarship	[Organization]	June	Yes
BOG Committee Assignments	[Removed]	June	Yes
Marion Drane Graham Scholars Naming	[Organization]	May	Yes
Marion Drane Graham Scholars Announcement	[Organization]	June	Yes
NC Teaching Fellows Commission Names 2020 Fellows	[Organization]	March	Yes
Officer of the Year Award		March	Yes
New Board Members	[Organization]	October	Yes
College Free Application Week		October	Yes
Thurgood Marshall College Fund	HBCU	June	Yes
Advancement Symposium	Advancement	May	Yes

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NC Teaching Fellows	[Organization]	April	Yes
[Organizational] Strategic Plan	President's Office		
Commencements	All	June	Yes
Communications Council Meeting	Communications		Yes
<b>College colors day</b>	All	Sept. 4	Yes
<b>Giving Tuesday</b>		Nov	Yes