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[Name]

## Marketing Gap Diagnostic™ Assessment Report

January 22, 2002

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## Introduction

On January 22, 2002, Marketing Hands performed a Marketing Gap Diagnostic for the College of Liberal Arts. The participants included:

[Name] Dean of the College of Liberal Arts  
[Name] Executive Director of University Relations  
[Name] Director of Media Relations  
[Name] Director of Advising  
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[Name] Center area of the revitalized [Name] corridor. It is beginning to expand to a few suburban locations for a few of the programs. The University is part of [Name] state higher education system. The Liberal Arts School is one of three major units within the University, the other two consisting of School of Business, and the School of Law.

The College of Liberal Arts educates upper division undergraduate and graduate students in several diverse disciplines. These are currently organized into the following divisions and schools:

The Division of Applied Psychology and Quantitative Methods  
The Division of Criminology, Criminal Justice, and Social Policy  
The Division of Legal, Ethical, and Historical Studies  
The School of Communications Design  
The School of Public Affairs

A recent Board of Governors study recommended restructure of the current schools and divisions into these schools:

Communications Design  
Information Arts and Technologies  
Citizenship and Public Affairs  
Applied behavioral and social studies  
Liberal Arts

In either case, the College is unique in that it combines a traditional liberal arts education with applied professional studies giving students that extra edge in a competitive employment landscape. The depth of programs available for students is impressive and is clearly the draw in attracting students. The school is well regarded by stakeholders including faculty, students, alumni and employers.

In the Spring 2001 Student Satisfaction Survey, 48% of the respondents said that the reason they chose the Liberal Arts College was the "Program of Study." Other significant plusses include caring faculty, small classes facilitating personal attention and location convenience with flexible class scheduling on weekends and evening hours. Some



divisions and schools have excellent internships and clinical programs. Also, in the survey, 70% of respondents would recommend the College to a friend or co-worker, 69% would recommend it to a family member, and another 25% would possibly do in so in each case.

### **Marketing Dilemma #1: Non-traditional Application of Liberal Arts**

The traditional liberal arts curriculum is not the strength of the school as the college's title implies according to interviewees. However, the University understands the value of the liberal arts to develop critical thinking capabilities and, therefore, has evolved them to support and provide in-depth conceptual and theoretical understanding to all professional studies programs. As a result the University has no interest in eliminating liberal arts courses. The College offers programs, which are not offered anywhere else, and has a "career-focus" not emphasized by the surrounding schools.

Other universities in the region have significantly stronger traditional liberal arts programs. The College does not wish to compete head-on with these programs because the College believes its approach is more effective in meeting the needs of the employer community. The [name] Workforce Educational Needs Assessment survey results state "employers hiring for positions that require a bachelor's degree prefer that the candidate have a degree in liberal arts with a concentration in a technical or professional field" [Spring 2001 Student Satisfaction Survey, p. 11].

The result is that University and College marketers find it difficult to position the college because of the dichotomy between the College's name and the actual content and direction of the College. These marketers find it difficult to explain how unique the University College is in "marrying liberal arts with professional studies." The message is easily lost on students, donors and politicians when one attempts to explain how the college teaches critical thinking plus specific skills and knowledge. People don't know how "liberal arts" fits into a "career minded" university. As one meeting participant stated, "the University is business, law, and what?"

### **Marketing Dilemma #2: Students are Non-traditional College Students**

The College of Liberal Arts has approximately 2,000 students, the vast majority coming from the [name] area. According to the Spring 2001 Student Satisfaction Survey, 95% live or within 50 miles of the campus and 77% work and live within that geography. The online courses are just beginning to expand the student population geographically.

The typical student is female (60%) or male (40%), in his/her early thirties (average age 32 ranging from 19-66) and employed (85%). Daytime students are younger (m=29) than night students (m=33) and weekend students are the oldest (m=37) [Spring 2001 Student Satisfaction Survey, p. 9]. In addition, the survey reported that full time students are younger than part-time students (29 vs. 35), almost 60% of the students are single, about 32% have children at home, 66% have parent who did not



complete a college degree, and 21% are first generation college students. Fourteen percent are minorities. Students are professionals and middle managers seeking a career change or advancement. These students juggle work, family and school.

Given these student demographics, providing services to them is challenging. For example, attendance at orientation is less than wanted due to the fact that students work and have many commitments.

Students, not their parents, make the decision to attend the University, are responsible for paying for their education, and as a result have extremely high expectations regarding faculty and course quality. They perceive themselves as customers of the College, although some suggest that the faculty does not always agree with this perception. Students are demanding in the classroom setting, capable of questioning and negotiating outcomes. Students are focused and know what they want. On occasion they can over commit themselves and take on too many courses. These are typically very driven individuals. While most students will complete a program, some students experience interruptions in their education because of personal obligations.

The result is that a vast majority of the College's potential students are in the workplace when they make the decision to attend the College. Historically, the majority of students learned of the College while attending one of the existing "feeder" community colleges or local universities. However, increasingly today the local universities are increasing their effort to recruit students from these feeder community colleges.

Reaching working potential students has challenges. Potential students are focused, but scattered among many local and regional businesses, making traditional academic "recruiting" practices ineffective. Finding and touching these potential students requires a concerted effort not only to identify them, but also to leverage relationships with the businesses themselves in the marketing effort. Historically, university business outreach to businesses has been very successful, but focused only on student employment opportunities after they graduate.

### Marketing Dilemma #3: Competition for Students Is Intense

Students traditionally come from the surrounding area community colleges, although this has declined since 1998. And, about 1/3 of the graduate students took their bachelor's degree from the University. There is competition in this geographic area for liberal arts programs, offered at less cost in some cases. [Name] has the most well-known honors program. As stated previously, this competition is aggressively going after the community college students to increase enrollment.

However, as stated above, the College offers programs, which are not offered anywhere else, and has a "career-focus" not emphasized in the surrounding schools. Other universities in the region have significantly stronger traditional liberal arts programs and the College does not wish to compete head-on with these programs.



Also, the University is limited in what its competition has or claims to have – campus environment, easy, fun events and programs for undergrads, athletic programs, ample parking, graduate level financial aid, student residence facilities and extensive suburban campus environments close to where many adult students live. With no central gathering place, no mailboxes for students, no automatic email for students at time of registration.

As was found in the 2001 Spring Student Survey, the students who attend the College choose it for – the programs, caring faculty, and convenient location. For those who considered, but did not choose the College, we do not know the reasons for their not choosing the College. The result is, that for the College to grow, the College must be able to position itself against the competition to distinguish itself clearly in potential students' minds. It must find ways to leverage what students say are their reasons for choosing the College.

#### **Marketing Dilemma #4: Limited In-house Marketing Resources**

Current marketing of the College is supported with University level marketing and specific program (school/division) level marketing. Each program is required to conduct its own student recruitment campaigns and marketing communications with limited administrative support. The College has no dedicated marketing resources and those at the University level have all three units plus the overall University within their scope of accountability. As a result, the College as an entity has little reputation of its own. It undertakes limited, tactical marketing efforts using outside resources. For example, a firm has been contracted with to develop a brochure, highlighting faculty, within the College.

University Relations, has as its role, the responsibility of marketing the University as a whole and supporting individual program marketing efforts. They are not equipped to conduct list research for the College's divisions and schools direct marketing campaigns, although it does help with the development and production of collateral materials (e.g., brochures) for all the 20 some programs. The University Relations group also brings-in media contacts, writes and places articles, and assists with message development and production for direct mail campaigns. Email is greatly underutilized as a marketing tool. Additionally, it manages the University website and provides templates for the individual colleges, schools and divisions, but does not provide content development support. The website has become an important part of the marketing mix since most potential customer first contact is through the website and all collateral materials drive readers to the website.

Potential students learn about the University most often through the website, by reading a collateral piece, and by word of mouth from other students. This year, University Relations is attempting to increase its reach to potential students through a significant



media campaign for 2002. Radio, TV and print advertising will promote the University and programs within the College.

There is no strategic marketing direction coming from the College level nor is there College level tactical support for the program directors. As stated earlier, each program conducts its own recruitment campaigns, website maintenance and other marketing communications activities. The result is differing levels of recruitment effectiveness and message and reach quality. A few programs appear to do well, but most struggle. It is also costly to the College in the long run. Both faculty and College administrators are frustrated with this. Faculty members do not see marketing as part of their roles and responsibilities and the College has no resources to provide direction and support.

Lastly, the University and, as a result, the College is living under a statewide hiring freeze for non-academic personnel as well as a University level financial shortfall from previous years. As a result, the College administration has no resources to undertake a consolidated of program level student recruitment and communications efforts.

The result is that the College fears mixed and, perhaps, inappropriate messages may confuse the market place and provide opportunities for the competition to gain market share unnecessarily.

## Summary

In summary, the Marketing Gap Diagnostic<sup>TM</sup> identified four distinct marketing dilemmas, that, if not addressed, will inhibit the College's student growth and continue to restrict the College's reputation within the [Name] area communities. The marketing dilemmas are:

1. Non-traditional Application of Liberal Arts

The College integrates liberal arts curriculum in non-traditional way to "career-focused" programs. This distinctive characteristic is not positioned clearly in potential students minds.

2. Students are Non-traditional College Students

Traditional approaches to student recruitment are no longer effective in a potential student market where students are older, make their own decisions, pay their own way, and work while they attend school. More targeted approaches are required.



### 3. Competition for Students Is Intense

As local universities aggressively market to the College's traditional sources for students, the College must, as stated above, find ways to distinguish itself from its competition. It must find ways to leverage what students say are their reasons for choosing the University – its programs, caring faculty, and convenient location. Confirmation that the current messages speak to this broader audience of potential students is needed.

### 4. Limited In-house Marketing Resources

There are no additional marketing resources available within the College or from the University, nor are the prospects for acquiring them hopeful over the 12-18 months. As a result, the decentralized program accountabilities for marketing must continue even though it is not a desired situation for either the faculty or administration.

## Recommended Actions

Given the dilemmas documented in this report, Marketing Hands proposes the College undertake four specific marketing development projects over the next 12 months. Each project is described in terms of its objectives, outcomes, methodology, and estimated schedule. Marketing Hands is prepared to undertake these projects on behalf of the College of Liberal Arts; however, the College may find other marketing support companies to complete the work. Four projects are recommended:

- Project #1: Positioning and Naming
- Project #2: Business Community Audience Analysis
- Project #3: List identification
- Project #4: Marketing Process Guide

### Project #1: Positioning and Naming

Objective(s): The purpose of this project is develop a College identity that is easy to articulate and meaningful to the marketplace. This identity will position the College against its competition in the potential student's mind. It provides an umbrella message and theme upon which all programs in the College can build. The whole will be greater than its parts and each part is then more meaningful to the marketplace.

Outcome(s):

- College name and logo
- Research report to support selections



Methodology: One goal of the approach is to provide the College community and its stakeholders with the opportunity to participate in the naming and positioning. The second goal is to test ideas in the marketplace. The activities for the methodology include:

1. Facilitate a 3-hour brain storming session with College stakeholders (e.g., program managers and representatives of the Dean's office) to create a list of potential names and logos.
2. Conduct focus group to test 3-5 names and logos with three audiences of constituencies. Focus group participants will be arranged by the College to save costs. Each group will have 8-10 individuals. People will be incented to participate with a \$50 honorarium. Each focus group will last 60-90 minutes. Focus groups are:
  - College faculty
  - Current Students
  - Potential Students
  - Business community representatives
3. Information analysis, recommendation development and recommendation presentation

Est. Schedule:

1. Brainstorming session - 1 week
2. Focus groups - 4 – 6 weeks
3. Analysis, etc. - 3 weeks

## Project #2: Business Community Audience Analysis

Objective(s): The purpose of this project is to identify strategies and tactics designed to more effectively reach the College's key target market – adults working in businesses in the [Name] area. In other words, through this project the College will identify new student recruitment approaches.



Outcome(s):

- Audience Analysis Report
- Marketing promotional strategies to reach potential students who are employees of area businesses.
- Example tactics (e.g., promotional pieces, referral incentive programs) and tactical plans for their distribution

Methodology:

The approach for this project is to first map where current students are working, then to conduct market research with those businesses and similar businesses and their employees. Sound sampling and statistical analysis techniques should be used. Also students can be enlisted as paid interns to assist in the project work to keep costs down. The approach includes these activities:

1. Analyze current student employment to develop map of student business employers. Similar businesses, if they exist in the [Name] area, will then be identified to create the universe from which interview sample will be taken.
2. Conduct interviews with business executives from a sample of the identified businesses. Information collection will focus on their interest in helping their employees learn more about educational opportunities that would improve their productivity, expertise for the business. It will also explore ways in which the business might partner with the College to communicate the College opportunities.
3. Conduct interviews with a sample of current students who work in the universe of businesses to better understand how we might reach their fellow employees with information about the benefits of the College. The objective here is to find ways to encourage (e.g., incentive referral programs) and increase "word of mouth" marketing, a strength of the College.
4. Develop marketing strategy, implementation options and sample materials. Through an analysis of the interview results, the strategy implementation options and sample materials will be designed. Stakeholders may participate in preliminary review sessions.
5. Presentation to the College which will include a review of the strategy, a discussion of ways to implement the strategy, and a display of sample tactics such as payroll



inserts, voice mail broadcasts, email promotions, and Intranet education pages that can be implemented in partnership with the businesses.

- Est. Schedule:
1. Analyze current student employment/area businesses – 2 weeks
  2. Conduct interviews – 2 weeks
  3. Develop strategy, etc. – 3-4 weeks
  4. Presentation – 1 day

### Project #3: List identification

Objective(s): The purpose of this project is to provide direct support to individual program directors to identify appropriate lists for their direct mail recruitment campaigns. This is a critical marketing activity that is not supported by University Relations and for which there is little or no expertise at the program level.

Outcome(s):

- A defined set of direct mail or email lists geared to a specific College program (online or in print media)  
A list description, an evaluation of its quality, the owner, prices, job titles, list use rules and procedures for procuring the lists will be included.

Methodology: This approach is repeated for each program that wants a set of lists developed.

1. Analyze program offerings through an analysis of the full curriculum.
2. Interview with the program director to gain an understanding into the socio-demographics of the potential students they are trying to reach.
3. Interview individuals with prior experience with this or similar programs direct marketing efforts.
4. Conduct the list research.
5. Prepare the list set.



- Est. Schedule:
1. Analyze program offerings – 1 week
  2. Conduct program director interview – 1 day
  3. Conduct previous experience interview – 1 day
  4. Conduct list research – 1 weeks
  5. Prepare list set – 1 week

#### Project #4: Marketing Process Guide

Objective(s): The purpose of this project is to produce a simple to use, self-administering guide (online or in print media) which program directors can use to develop student recruitment campaigns for their programs. Its aim is to address the program director problems and issues regarding marketing activities.

Outcome(s): A Pilot Tested Marketing Process Guide

This guide will provide College level umbrella messages to be included, templates for various pieces (e.g. email promotions, direct mail promotions, press releases, media Q&A preparation, etc.), the steps and time lines for planning and executing a student recruitment or communications campaign and other helpful hints for marketing for the non-marketing professional/professor.

Methodology: The approach for this project is to involve the program directors in the development and testing of the guide. The activities include:

1. Identity key design concepts and issues to be addressed through 60-90 minute interviews with the program directors and key staff. Sessions may be 1-1 or group sessions. Up to 10 may be required.
2. Create preliminary Marketing Process Guide.
3. Conduct pilot application of guide with volunteer program director. This pilot would include an orientation to the guide, hotline support (telephone and email discussions to solve problems, etc.) for its use, and periodic feedback (face-to-face) sessions to review progress, identify enhancements and revisions.



4. Finalization of guide.
5. Rollout guide to all program directors. This includes one on-one orientation sessions and the provision of hotline support during their first use of the guide.

Est. Schedule:

1. Interviews with program directors – 2 weeks
2. Create preliminary guide – 2 weeks
3. Conduct pilot – 3 months
4. Finalize guide – 3 weeks
5. Rollout guide and provide hotline Q&A support– 6 months

### Conclusion

The College of Liberal Arts at the University can develop a marketing strategy and provide support to its programs without increasing current staff by implementing the action recommendations of this report. Each project delivers a specific marketing solution to address the marketing dilemmas revealed through Marketing Hands' Diagnostic Gap Analysis.

