Promoting the academy – the challenges of marketing higher education

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Abstract

One of the challenges in promoting higher education is the assumption that students are not customers or neither are their parents. Also, many academics and university personnel are likely to view marketing as compromising academic freedom. Additionally, universities attempt to market what is essentially a service in the same way as they market products. Universities have third party accountability, client uncertainty, limited differentiality and making doers into sellers. Some of the barriers to implementing marketing programs is shared governance, decentralized decision making, collaborative environment and the relationship between faculty and administration. Historically, many university marketing and communication offices have foundations in public relations, public affairs and community relations. The present study attempted to answer the following questions. 1. How are today's university marketers making decisions and what are their greatest challenges? 2. Given the characteristics of an academic environment, what challenge does the university marketer face when allocating often inadequate resources? The sample for the study was university communication professionals. The results indicated less than 50% had a marketing plan for more than one year and that only 41% of these professionals allocated their marketing dollars on the basis of marketing demand. One conclusion from the study is to develop a curriculum that is in tune with the student. This can be the most important marketing asset that an organization can use in its marketing programs. One lesson learned from the study is that all aspects of encounters with university by perspective students, parents, current students and alumni are elements that partially compare the brand.

Keywords: Allocation, Service, Advertising, Barriers, Implementation

I. The Challenge

One of the most heated conference presentations I have ever witnessed took place in a large lecture hall at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and it involved an academic vice president at one prestigious Jesuit university and a vice president for university relations at another. The topic? Branding. Many people outside of higher education have a hard time understanding why universities have a history of reluctance in embracing marketing strategies to connect themselves with their key audiences -- primarily prospective students and donors. While the conversation at LMU in June 2004 likely was heightened by the added element of including faith into the branding discussion, faculty and administrators at secular universities have just as vehemently denounced what they view as attempts to make customers out of students. Against this historical backdrop, how is the marketer in today's highly competitive higher education market to make decisions regarding the allocation of scarce resources among institutional priorities and educational programs?

II. The Context

Students are not customers; neither are their parents. We do not have customers. We must keep repeating this. That a group of administrators in Jesuit higher education would state otherwise in a document of potential strategic importance should concern us. Do not accept that 'customers' is a term of art. It is an assumption inherent in 'branding' and it defiles our mission. (Hollwitz, 2004)

John Hollwitz, Ph.D., who spoke at the aforementioned conference, was vice president for academic affairs at Fordham University when he wrote the above passage in an article on the "problem" of branding. For Hollwitz and many other members of the academic side of the house, marketing and branding represent attempts to denigrate higher education by reducing its essence to shorthand, to an easily remembered slogan and one that might not even be true.

Thomas J. Hayes, Ph.D., professor of marketing at Xavier University, higher education marketing consultant and author, explains this notion as an almost primal fear that resides within many faculty members.

The fact is that many professionals working on the college campus, particularly faculty members, are likely to feel that implementing marketing techniques limits and compromises academic freedom. In addition, they may also feel that the real business of marketing is to create illusions. Beautiful pictures of a college campus on a fall day, combined with well-crafted ad copy, seem to offer promises that cannot be kept. (Hayes, 2008)

So why should the marketing department care what those in the academic division think about the appropriateness of university marketing activities? The reasons are multiple and varied, from historical precedents to modern practicalities. Academe is a place for collegiality, for shared governance, for decisions by committee. In many university organizational structures, the enrollment division—a major client of the marketing and communications office—falls under the auspices of the academic division. This means decisions on marketing objectives, strategies, tactics and budgets must be made in a collaborative manner.

For Hayes, a paramount reason to work together is that "marketing cannot be left up to 'the marketing department.'" He says that all at the university must work together to deliver what today's students are looking for – "a total educational experience." That is certainly evidenced at our own University, according to our admission staff. Students visit multiple campuses and make comparisons, comparisons of amenities such as recreational facilities and living spaces; services such as financial aid, information technology and tutoring; and the educational experience itself.

Perhaps the mistake some university marketers make is trying to market what amounts to a service (although faculty might disagree with this premise) in the same way they would market products. Hayes contends that although a university's core business is education, it also participates in a variety of service businesses. It's not surprising that some marketers have trouble making distinctions regarding strategy, according to Hayes, because the literature did not fully acknowledge the distinctiveness of marketing services until the mid 1990s. Anyone who has studied marketing in a cursory manner is familiar with the "four Ps" that constitute marketing: product, price, place and promotion. For services marketing, Hayes adds three additional Ps: physical evidence, processes and people.

For physical evidence, Hayes describes how physical facilities can translate into perceptions of quality, as in the case of a student who comes from an upscale high school with science labs sporting the latest technological advances and tours a college campus that has older science labs but may boast a Nobel laureate on the faculty. The appearance of the lab may make a statement that's hard to counter through other facts.

Processes in a university setting means that when students conduct business with the financial aid office or seek to arrange tuition payments with the business office, their baseline for performance is the excellent customer service they experience at their local bank branch. If they encounter archaic methods of moving through the system or a process that's not accommodating, they will form an opinion about the university that could conceivably carry through to taint their impression of the educational quality.

Lastly, Hayes cites people as the crux of any service-based business. His example, universities that tout personal attention, matches what is emerging as a strong brand characteristic of Rockhurst. This means that all faculty and staff at the university must accept the responsibility of ensuring this brand promise is kept, from the person who takes the tuition check to the chemistry professor teaching a difficult class to the person making lunch in the cafeteria.

In addition to making the distinction that marketers cannot use the same methods to market services as goods, Hayes further delineates marketing higher education from marketing other services. He cites marketing guru Philip Kotler, author of many authoritative marketing texts. Kotler identifies 10 problems inherent in marketing services and Hayes takes this a step further to apply these problems to marketing higher education. (Hayes, 2008)

Problem	University Concern
Third-Party Accountability	Universities must maintain credibility with parents, donors, alumni, employers and other stake holders
Client Uncertainty	It's documented that consumers of big-ticket items can feel buyer's remorse, so most salespeople follow up shortly after the sale to ensure customers are comfortable with their decision and to counteract any extreme fears. After a student makes the major decision about which college to attend, key units within the university, such as student development, the business office and the academic department, must maintain contact to reinforce that the student's decision was wise and valid. Little or no contact between the time of acceptance and reporting for class can result in a student changing his or her mind.

Experience is Essential	The university's "brand" is based on quality, which often translates into faculty with vast teaching experience. However, especially in business-related disciplines, this must also translate into real-world experiences. Marketers must be able to accurately convey this balance.
Limited Differentiality	Although universities know they must find the unique attributes that make their institution distinctive, claims for universities within the same category, such as faith-based liberal arts colleges, may sound very similar: "academic rigor, personal attention, and the teaching of values and ethics."
Maintaining Quality Control	All service industries experience variability in quality control because the humans delivering the service can be inconsistent transaction to transaction and person to person. Quality at a university depends not only on behavior and competence of all faculty and staff it depends on the behavior of the students who become alumni – a key indicator of reputation.
Making Doers Into Sellers	Faculty can be highly effective in the recruiting process but may be resistant to this role that seems outside their area of responsibility.
Allocating Faculty and Staff Time to Marketing	Hayes expounds on the previous problem by making the case that even if faculty are resistant the university will benefit from a culture shift toward involving everyone in marketing efforts to the extent that this expectation is made explicit in job descriptions.
Reorienting the Reactive to the Proactive	"The orientation of most institutions of higher education is naturally reactive rather than proactive…In most colleges and universities, marketers are tasked with marketing the institution as it is. *This is who we are and what we offer,* administrators tell the marketers. *Promote it.*"
Conflicting Views on Advertising	Traditionally, some in higher education equate marketing with advertising and feel that at the worst, advertising cheapens the university image and puts it on par with for-profit educational institutions. At the best, it wastes scares institutional resources that could be channeled toward academic programs. Others believe it is a valuable tool for educating potential students and donors about the university's benefits.
A Limited Marketing Knowledge Base	Hayes contends that every faculty and staff member must have a basic grasp of marketing principles to achieve the levels of service required to effectively market the university. He contends that marketers in general do not have solid base of knowledge regarding the marketing of services and that higher education is even more specialized. Marketers who come from an environment of marketing goods must become familiar with the politics and stakeholder groups in an academic setting. Likewise, faculty and staff who have had no exposure to marketing concepts need basic training.

III. Current Practice

Although nonprofit higher education at large has been slow to adopt many practices that are standard in the corporate setting, some areas of the academy, such as the business office, information technology, and student housing have taken great strides in this area. From methods of investing the endowment to implementing purchasing procedures to outsourcing operations such as the bookstore and construction and management of apartment-style residence halls, the functional areas that oversee these efforts have blazed a trail that has made more people within higher education at least familiar with, if not comfortable with or accepting of, ways of doing things that seem new and foreign.

Throughout the past decade, offices of marketing, public relations and communication, however they are labeled, also have begun to change. The reasons for this are multiple. Of primary importance, especially for smaller institutions, is that stiff competition demands assertive action to attract and retain students in the target markets. According to information from Noel Levitz enrollment management consultants, there are 129 colleges and universities in Missouri and 59 in Kansas. When prospective students have this many choices, universities must not only get the right information into the right hands, they must clearly differentiate themselves from competitors and fulfill the brand promise throughout all phases of engagement, including inquiry, matriculation, student and alumnus.

While past offices of marketing communication focused primarily on public relations efforts, advertising and fulfilling requests from the enrollment office for print collateral pieces, most universities today have placed marketing and branding efforts front and center. A June 2008 article from *Currents,* the magazine published by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, discusses the changing paradigm. "It used to be that if you scratched the surface of a campus communications office, more often than not you would find a former journalist. But that began to change when the news-bureau model of campus communications evolved into an integrated marketing operation." (Jarrell, 2008)

As the university marketing function becomes more focused on standard practices such as developing and implementing formal marketing plans, establishing metrics to measure accountability and including new methods of communication in the marketing mix, it is appropriate to also review how marketing budgets are allocated among insitutional initiatives, including academic programs — the rough equivalent of product lines in a corporate environment.

Methodology

To better assess current practices among university marketers, research was conducted on how marketing decisions are made in the higher education environment. A survey was developed to assess the extent to which formal marketing plans are employed, what foundation they are based on, what they contain, what metrics are used and upon what basis funds are divided among needs. The results should not be considered scientifically valid as the respondents self selected, but some the answers did yield useful information.

After creating the survey using Survey Monkey software, a link was sent to three different list servs: Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities communicators list, the PIOnet list sponsored by Newswise/ProfNet, and the Council of Independent Colleges public relations list. These are lists that are regularly monitored and used to gather information. One problem with using them is that there might be more people who are public relations practitioners, magazine editors and media relations directors than those who handle the marketing function. However, many people in the field handle a mix of responsibilities. In the e-mail messages that were sent, it was requested the survey link be sent to the chief marketing officer. It was stated the survey was part of academic research and had no commercial objective and the author offered to send the results to anyone who requested them.

There are no definitive numbers on how many members collectively subscribe to the three lists, some of whom subscribe to more than one, but it was estimatedthat the number is at least 1,000. Of all those who received the request, 22 individuals completed the survey.

Results

The majority of respondents (86 percent) said their university has a written marketing plan and 43 percent of them have had a plan for between one and five years. Only two of the respondents (9.5 percent) said the instituion has had a plan for more than 10 years. This validates the assumption that offices are working toward establishing formal working documents. The vast majority of the respondents indicated their plans are updated at least yearly if not more often.

One challenge marketers in an academic setting face is the lack of stated plans, goals and objectives by either the institution as a whole or individual academic units upon which a marketing plan would logically be based. It is not that these plans don't exist, but that a tradition of operating in silos keeps the information from being shared. In many cases, an academic division or department might have data that would be very helpful to the marketers, but simply doesn't realize the potential benefits of sharing. Some of this likely stems from references earlier in this document to the misconception that marketing equals advertising so they might not understand that data on current students or trends in their field, for example, could be valuable.

To help determine which foundational documents marketing directors use to create marketing plans, the following question was included in the survey: Which of the following units have annual business plans to help guide your marketing plan? Advancement office, Enrollment office, Schools or colleges, Departments, Athletics , None of the above, Other.

Not surprsingly, the majority of respondents indicated that the enrollment office has a plan that informs their marketing plan (63 percent). A close second was the advancement office with 53 percent. Although a quarter of the respondents indicated individual schools or colleges have plans with an additional 15 percent mentioning departments, the wording of some answers in the comment box makes one wonder if the question was understood correctly. "Supplemental plans for departments as needed" indicates the respondent is viewing the question in light of which university areas the marketing department includes in its marketing plan, not which areas supply a business plan that informs marketing decisions.

Additional responses of note included: "alumni," "our marketing plan is based on a five-year university strategic plan" and "departments share goals but not business plans." The final answer reinforces the theory that while academic units do set enrollment goals, the idea of sharing these numbers with the marketing department is to get help in increasing inquiries rather than for marketers to be present in developing overall strategy that might include plans for future programs, the role of current programs in the "product life cycle," etc.

Elements of the Marketing Plan

Two elements were near universal components of respondents' marketing plans: 95 percent indicated their plans included institutionwide marketing goals and branding goals. Web development goals were contained in 74 percent of respondents' plans, media relations goals in 68 percent and new media/social networking goals in 42 percent. Advancement and recruiting goals were also indicated as part of marketing plans, but only 16 percent of respondents indicated inclusion of marketing goals by individual programs. Following each element, it was asked if there was a budget allocated for that element within the marketing plan. For example, while 95 percent indicated the inclusion of branding goals in the plan, only 42 percent included a branding budget. Interestingly enough, only 26 percent of respondents indicated having a market research budget.

Looking at the results of this question leads me to believe that marketing departments are viewing the marketing plans as a way to establish goals primarily for marketing elements over which they have control, such as branding, institutional marketing, the Web and media relations. The absence of goals and budgets for individual programs seems to be a missed opportunity for partnering with academic units.

The previous reference to the "four Ps" of marketing makes it clear that promotion is only one P, but it's the P that becomes the focus of the marketing plan created by university marketing departments. It is valuable to remember that for the univeristy as a whole, the other Ps of marketing must also be addressed. Higher education marketing specialist Robert Sevier, Ph.D., offers insight into ranking the Ps. "I have long felt that a curriculum that is in-tune with the students in your marketplace is the most important marketing asset of all. Programs that are sought after by students and differentiated from those offered by your competitors are much more valuable than a better price or even a better promotions plan." (Robert A. Sevier, 2003)

Resource Allocation

One of the objectives of the survey was the question of how closesly aligned university marketers are with conventional marketing and business practices with the question, "When allocating your marketing dollars, which of the following do you base your decisions on?" The answers reflected more of a market/business oriented approach than I anticipated:
Relevance to university mission — 73 percent
Future market outlook — 45.5 percent
Market demand — 41 percent
Contribution margin of programs — 32 percent
Tradition — 27 percent
Political consideration — 23 percent
None of the above — 4.5 percent
Other: strategic plan priorities; VP presents budget and finds out how much will be received.

The Biggest Challenge

The question that yielded the most interesting results by far was the open-ended question, "What do you think is the biggest challenge in determining marketing budget allocations in a higher education setting?" The answers touched on many of the topics mentioned in the first section of this paper regarding the complexities of practicing the marketing discipline in an academic setting. Answers included:

- Prioritization: recruiting vs. advancment; traditional media vs. new media.
- Tight budgets means marketing intiatives compete with other needs, inlcuding academic programs.
- Acceptance of brand marketing and managing under a business model.
- Fair allocation: Most often, the departments which generate the most revenue will get the largest amount of dollars.
- Lack of strategic marketing background among senior administration.
- Decentralization and rapid change.
- Not enough resources for market research, so decisions are best guesses.
- Working in an integrated fashion.
- Getting all of the departments and schools to buy into one strategy; see past their own immediate demands and buy into how their demands fit into and are prioritized within the big picture.
- POLITICS
- The diminishing impact of traditional media.

Conclusions

As mentioned earlier, the survey sample is extremely small and respondents self selected, which indicates they likely have a high interest in this topic and might be working on marketing-related challenges at their own institutions. As such, one would not want to extrapolate these answers to the entire population of university marketing officers. The majority of these responses came from universities with 6,000 or fewer students and are private universities. One could hypothesize that larger universities with larger marketing departments might take a more qualitative approach, are more results driven and include budgets earmarked for specific marketing activities. The next step in this research would spend more time analyzing university Web sites looking for names, titles and e-mail addresses of chief marketing officers and send them a direct request and link to the survey. This should improve the response rate.

One of the primary challenges for academic marketers, and one that also exists for many corporate marketers, is the lack of adequate rescources — human and financial — available for marketing activities. In an environment of scarce resources, it becomes imperative to use each dollar wisely. Through the research conducted for this study, the author had hoped to uncover simple, neat formulas that would allow me to examine the current allocations of marketing dollars in my department and making any adjustments based on sound quantitative measures. Although it's not that easy, a look at best practices in a corporate setting can provide useful tools for auditing our decision-making processes.

IV. Budget Development and Allocation

A review of marketing literature shows that a standard component of a marketing plan is a detailed budget. Several key methods can be used to arrive at an appropriate budget, and to allocate resources among products or programs within that budget. As such, I found it surprising that my survey respondents did not reference many specific budget components in their marketing plans.

Several methods for determining an appropriate overall organizatioal marketing budget seem to be common. *The Successful Marketing Plan* describes three. (Hiebing Jr & Cooper, 2003) 1.) Task Method: The budget is based on estimates of how much funding is required for each marketing activity outlined in the plan. 2.) Percent-of-Sales Method: The budget is based on percentage of overall sales. The text suggests that by examining marketing spend of competitors an industry standard will emerge. 3.) Competitive Method: The budget is based on trying to meet or top the budget of competitors.

In addition to these three methods, Allen Andreasen and Philip Kotler suggest two additional approaches in a text directed toward marketing for nonprofit organizations. (Kotler & Andreasen, 1996). 1.) Affordable Method: The organization bases the marketing budget on what it thinks it can afford. This is similar to the survey respondent who said she proposes a budget to the president and the board and then finds out what she will receive. 2.) Response Optimization Method: In this method, the marketer uses quantitative formulas to estimate marketing response at alternative budget levels to find the optimal level of response for dollars spent.

While any of the above methods could conceivably be used to ascertain a university's marketing budget, Kotler and Andreasen suggest three steps an organization should undertake prior to the budget stage that could propose varying levels of challenge for the university marketer.

The first step is to estimate the size of current demand and compare sales to the industry to determine whether market share is improving or declining. For a university to be effective at this step, it must clearly define the type of prospective student it is trying to recruit and agree on the institutions that are in its competitive set. This is easier said than done. This process must be repeated for each major recruiting segment. Institutions competing for first-time college students may not be the same as those competiting for MBAs, for example.

The second step is to estimate future demand using "any combination of six forecasting methods: buyer intentions survey, intermediary estimates, expert estimates, market tests, time-series analysis or statistical demand analysis." (Kotler & Andreasen, 1996) One challenge in many academic environments is that there is no individual or function is charged with looking toward future demand for existing or potential academic programs. Recruiters in the admission office who show extra initiative may seek out macroenvironmental information to predict possible numbers, but this doesn't appear to be common. At our University, our enrollment management firm provides funnels that show how many inquiries are needed to convert to a targeted number of applications that yield a targeted number of enrolled students. However, this final target number appears to be derived more from the numbers needed to achieve university budgeting goals rather than from an examination of the potential market.

The third step is to choose between alternate products or programs for which the authors suggest using a cost/benefit analysis. For the nonprofit organization, they acknowledge that nonquantifiable benefits should be taken into account along with financial benefits. While this information is meant to aid in choosing one course of action over another ("A university is trying to decide between building some badly needed dormitories and building a badly needed student union." (Kotler & Andreasen, 1996)), it seems to be one potential quantifiable method to try to arrive at allocating marketing dollars among the various programs, including academic programs. As mentioned in the survey results section, 32 percent of respondents indicate they base their decisions in part on the contribution margin of programs.

The prospect of using a concept such as this for marketing purposes, which in its normally accepted definition includes decisions about which "product" an organization offers, is likely one reason faculty and academic administrators feel uneasy about marketing. Indeed, the Wikipedia entry on "contribution margin" includes the following information: "Given the contribution margin, a manager can easily compute breakeven and target income sales, and make better decisions about whether to add or subtract a product line, about how to price a product or service, and about how to structure sales commissions or bonuses." (Contribution Margin) Some may read between the lines and arrive at the decision that marketers who use contribution or profit margin calculations when allocating marketing dollars will next recommend that academic programs that don't turn enough of a profit should be eliminated. In some cases this may be true, but it is highly unlikely that a university would eliminate a major that is central to its mission or that is a foundational discipline of the business school, for example.

To base marketing allocations among programs — especially academic programs — on cost/benefit analysis or a contribution or profit margin calculation requires time, resources and effort that are often hard to come by in resource-challenged environments. When evaluating the benefits of the program, for example, Kotler and Andreasen suggest that three groups naturally emerge: monetarily quantifiable benefits, nonmonetary quantifiable benefits and nonquantifiable benefits, such as amount of happiness created or fear relieved. The first group is fairly straightforward. A look at the profit margin per credit hour and the future market of qualified students can yield a reasonable estimate. The second group might consist of number of alumni who would eventually be counted as a result of the addition or strengthening of a program. The last group is the most subjective and hardest to measure. It could include enhanced value to the university's brand if the academic program is meaningful to the mission, even if it doesn't attract vast numbers of students or yield a high profit margin per credit hour.

V. Rockhurst University

Many of the challenges of allocating marketing budgets cited by respondents apply to Rockhurst as well. While these may cut across organizational type and also apply to corporate or other nonprofit settings, additional research is needed to determine the best course of action. However, it seems clear that a particular set of challenges does apply to higher education in general and to Rockhurst. The list will focus on the following top five challenges. These challenges provide a framework for discussing our current situation, recommendations and likelihood of change.

Top Five Marketing Allocation Challenges

Struggling to apply more quantitatively based marketing efforts in an environment that espouses decisions by consensus and "fairness."

We have not tried to apply cost/benefit or other weighted ranking formulas to the various marketing initiatives to help guide decision about budget allocations. In the past, PRM(Public Relations and Marketing) met with recruiters for the major programs and academic deans to discuss marketing strategies and budgets and sometimes faced acrimonious debates about who should command a greater allotment. Since no additional funds are available, funds have to be reapportioned.

Recommendations: A better approach is to create a set framework for making allocation decisions then examine current proportions according to this framework. Factors that should be taken into consideration include: strategic plan priorities, accordance with the University mission, current and potential future market demand and profitability. And, while we should always work toward a collegial environment, one person (or group) must be able to make decisions based on sound marketing principles without encountering turf wars. During the past two to three years, this problem has actually lessened.

Balancing overall institutional needs, such as branding, with the needs of particular departments or academic programs.

When recruiters are held accountable for enrollment metrics and deans also have a vested interest in increasing numbers of students in their divisions, it is sometimes difficult to make a case for preserving funding for institutional marketing and branding.

Recommendations: Branding goals and accompanying budget must be established first, before funds are allocated elsewhere. According to Sevier, 30 percent of the budget should be spent on brand marketing. Internal communications objectives should include increasing the awareness of faculty and administrators of how institutional branding can assist all programs.

Decentralization of funds available for marketing.

Recruiters and departments such as alumni and advancement have operational budgets they administer. Part of these funds can be used to supplement the funds controlled by PRM allocated toward their program. This is somewhat problematic because it means a department with extra funding could outspend a department of greater strategic importance. It also means that these departments sometimes create their own marketing materials that PRM never sees, or receives in the mail along with everyone else. This makes it difficult to standardize branding messages and images.

Recommendations: An effort should be made to educate the planning and budgeting committee to the impact centralized marketing and market budgeting could have on the institution. Efforts also should be directed toward those who control the individual budgets. PRM could partner with these individuals to learn how much they are spending on marketing, which currently is unknown. PRM could then develop a proposal for a program and projected outcomes using the entire budget if PRM directs the efforts.

Lack of assigned responsibility for assessing viability of current and potential academic programs in light of current and future market demand.

When academic programs struggle as a result of their life-cycle phase, actions of competing institutions, economic conditions or other factors, there doesn’t seem to be anyone in charge of leading a discussion about next steps. Occasionally the viability of an academic program has been in question with no clear communication between the academic unit and PRM. This means that marketing efforts continue in one office while discussions about possibly discontinuing the program occur simultaneously in another office. In addition, little effort is made to determine potential markets for possible new programs, examine potential programs in light of competitive positioning, etc. The focus is primarily on existing programs and maintaining the status quo.

Recommendations: Include a senior member of the PRM team in any academic committees regarding program development and planning. It would be helpful if the executive director of marketing communication served on the Academic Affairs Council. In addition, someone in each academic unit should be assigned the responsibility of routinely researching and reporting the market share of academic programs, monitoring new programs sponsored by competing institutions and making recommendations for new programs to explore based on the macroeconomic environment. The University Planning and Budgeting Committee has begun discussions and has asked for broad input regarding possible new revenue streams, so this situation soon may improve.

Inability to differentiate institution from similar competitors.

Small faith-based institutions such as Rockhurst often promote the benefits of personal attention, academic quality, and a focus on ethics or social justice. Even many public universities have increased efforts to engage students in community service.

Recommendations: PRM is already leading an effort to clarify and strengthen the Rockhurst brand. Personal attention is emerging as a strong defining attribute, but we must discover if we do this in a way that's different from other universities, or if there are other attributes that are more particular to Rockhurst. We also have had numerous discussions about the role of "Jesuit" in the brand and how the attributes of a Jesuit education might be differentiators. We have identified next steps in the branding effort if additional funding were available and that funding is being sought.

VI. Going Forward

While this admittedly is a subjective assessment, the author believes the culture of the University has begun to change during the past two years. When the new president assumed office three years ago, he assessed the University's financial situation and was able to create a "call to duty" speech to prompt individuals and departments to work together for the greater good of the institution. The author has observed individuals step forward to make recommendations for improvement, to put in extra time and effort when staffs and budgets have been cut and, finally, to express hope about future direction.

Of the recommendations that have been proposed, the ones that will be the most challenging to implement are the centralization of the marketing budget and the determination of a unique competitive advantage. Even these are not insurmountable when considering the can-do attitude that is beginning to take hold throughout the university.

So, while Rockhurst shares many of the challenges inherent in creating and executing marketing plans within the context of higher education, we already have made progress in recent years. As we move forward, it is imperative to keep everyone focused and communicating with each other and to abandon the artificial boundaries we erect over definitions of words such as "branding" and "customer." Ultimately the goal always was and always will be to serve the student by making available an education that opens personal and professional doors. Within this framework, the possibilities are limitless.

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