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Project: Telling the Student Affairs story



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Incorporating outcomes and evidence into marketing efforts for the Division of Student Affairs to proudly show the University the integrated strategic planning and assessment work that has been accomplished to date, and to demonstrate its effectiveness.

Background

The Division wants to proudly show the University and the rest of its diverse constituency the integrated strategic planning and assessment work that has been accomplished to date, and to demonstrate its effectiveness.

Challenge

The purpose of this project was to help Student Affairs coordinate and integrate assessment results into existing and future marketing efforts. The goals were threefold:

1. Demonstrate the variety of ways in which Student Affairs supports the mission and goals of WMU
2. Communicate to a variety of constituents, in diverse ways, how Student Affairs uses evidence and outcomes for decision-making, planning, and change
3. Tell the Student Affairs story - incorporating outcomes and evidence into marketing efforts in order to:
 - Disseminate the assessment and planning undertaken at the department and division levels and

- communicate the results to a variety of constituents
- Communicate how Student Affairs uses evidence for planning and change
- Enhance the work of the Student Affairs Marketing Team by providing approaches and suggestions for integrating the use of assessment results into existing and future marketing efforts

Solution

1. Our project launched in May 2015 at **Free the Data! Using Outcomes to Tell Our Story**, a retreat for Student Affairs Planning and Assessment committee members. Stone Soup developed and delivered an interactive storytelling presentation to get team members to explore what is already known, and how they might tell their "story", aka, assessment results. This is a step towards achieving *transparency*, a tenet of their commitment to a *culture of evidence*, so outsiders can see and understand contributions to student and institutional success.



This event was summarized in Stone Soup's post-retreat re-cap report.

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▲ POST-RETREAT OUTCOMES REPORT

2. Next, we created a **Visual Matrix** to graphically illustrate Student Affairs' structure and commitment to intentional planning and collaborative organizational change.

3. We conducted an internal **communications audit** to review existing marketing and branding materials from each department related to Student Affairs assessment, planning and marketing. Our goal was to determine which messages were being communicated to their constituents; how design and branding elements were being used; and if they were consistent – like they were coming from "one voice".

Other work included designing a new template for their **Strategic Plan** document and conducting 1-on-1 **phone interviews** with the individuals responsible for overseeing each of the Division's main assessment efforts.

Results

Our final deliverable was a **Recommendations Report** which outlined Student Affairs' strengths and opportunities, along with ten recommendations, with visual samples for each. For example:

- Share results with an annual, impact or briefing report
- Acknowledge student participation in assessments
- Tell a meaningful story with data by knowing your audience
- Structure assessments to provide the data needed for stories



▲ PAGES FROM FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

We found Student Affairs had many strengths, including:

- Division mission, vision, values and goals are in alignment with University's
- Staff share a positive attitude and willingness to celebrate the assessment and outcomes that have been reported on and discussed internally
- Staff with marketing responsibilities at the department level have adhered to University-wide branding guidelines; web design and marketing pieces across the division reflect this coordinated approach

Several opportunities exist:

- Improve the use of collected data for decision making, especially through dialogue regarding the intersection of findings between various assessments
- Improve campus communication so faculty and other internal constituents are aware of the work being done in each department of Student Affairs
- Re-structure the marketing team

Change can come slowly to academic institutions. WMU's Division of Student Affairs is in the process of implementing many of these suggestions. ☺