

# AC 2020-2021 Assessment

## Public Information & Media Relations, Marketing & Branding

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**Northwestern Mission.** Northwestern State University is a responsive, student-oriented institution committed to acquiring, creating, and disseminating knowledge through innovative teaching, research, and service. With its certificate, undergraduate, and graduate programs, Northwestern State University prepares its increasingly diverse student population to contribute to an inclusive global community with a steadfast dedication to improving our region, state, and nation.

**External Affairs:** External Affairs provides multimedia services to promote a positive image of Northwestern State University through relationships with the local community, the media, our alumni, prospective students, donors and government and civic leaders. These offices units play an important role in showcasing the university and impacting enrollment, fundraising, alumni and community involvement, and other goals. The Division is directly involved in promoting a learning-centered environment, improving retention and graduation rates and maintaining a positive, student-oriented atmosphere. External Affairs includes a diverse segment of the university that includes Athletics, Alumni and Development, Wellness, Recreation and Activities Center (WRAC); The Robert Wilson Recreation Complex; NSU Press/Publications, Marketing and Branding, NSU TV, University Printing, the News Bureau (Office of Communications), Photo Services and Sports Information.

**Public Information & Media Relations/Marketing & Branding and Mission:** The mission of the two units is to promote the university, its students, faculty, staff, programming, accomplishments and resources to external audiences through a variety of media platforms. These units work collaboratively with each other and with personnel from throughout the campus to highlight activities, events, opportunities and milestones related to all aspects of Northwestern State. The work of the units helps attract and retain students as well as enhances alumni and community engagement.

**Methodology:** The assessment process includes:

- (1) Data from assessment tools (both direct – indirect, quantitative and qualitative) are collected and returned to the executive director;
- (2) The executive director will analyze the data to determine whether the applicable outcomes are met:
- (3) Results from the assessment will be discussed with the appropriate staff;
- (4) Individual meetings will be held with staff as required (show cause);

## AC 2020-2021 Assessment

(5) The executive director, in consultation with the staff and senior leadership, will determine propose changes to measurable outcomes, assessment tools for the next assessment period and, where needed, service changes.

### Service Outcomes:

**SO 1.** Create broad and positive exposure for Northwestern State on the local, regional and national level by (1) Promotion of programs and opportunities available by (2) promotion of student, faculty and institutional accomplishments and (3) increased engagement both internally and externally.

### Measure 1.1.

Public Information/Media Relations issues timely press releases, website updates and accompanying photos and graphics with the goal of engagement by 100 percent of local media, 60 percent of regional media and 30 percent of national print and online media organizations.

**Finding:** Target met.

**Analysis:** In 2019-20 the target was engagement by 100 percent of local media, 60 percent of regional media and 30 percent of national print and online media organizations. Based on the analysis of these results in 2020-2021 personnel targeted press releases to specific markets and observed spikes of interested related to Athletics and Recruiting initiatives. Staff maintained a proactive approach in reaching out to media to “pitch” story ideas to relevant markets.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the cancellation of athletic contests and campus activities and events cost the university earned media that would be difficult to calculate. However, news media sought angles from the college student perspective that generated positive exposure for the university’s response to the pandemic. PIMR personnel at Northwestern State coordinated and communicated with sister schools in the University of Louisiana System to send cohesive, comprehensive messaging regarding campus operations on a local, state and national level.

In 2020-2021, the target was met. News outlets were receptive to all press releases in an attempt to keep COVID coverage in higher education current. Based on the number and frequency of press releases, photos and social media posts and shares, along with the growth in updates and human-interest stories that developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, NSU news reached most targeted media outlets. News outlets were also receptive to information disseminated in the aftermath of Hurricanes Laura and Delta and the February 2021 ice storm.

This goal was met on the local and regional level. From July 2020- March 2021, NSU News Bureau and Sports Information combined to send out over 526 press releases and accompanying photos and social media posts. (The figures are down from the

## AC 2020-2021 Assessment

previous year because of the cancellation of events and university closure.) However, 100 percent of the stories and photos that were released were published and/or broadcast by media.

**Action - Decision or Recommendation:** Based on the analysis of 2020-2021 results Public Information & Media Relations will in 2021-2022 work with other units on campus – and with our sister schools in the UL System -- to maximize publicity for the university’s assets, programs, accomplishments and opportunities, pandemic recovery and plans for moving forward. The staff should continue to strategically “pitch” stories to specific markets, localize stories when necessary and continue to make new media contacts.

### Measure 1.2.

Marketing and Branding will increase the university’s social media engagement by 15 percent per year.

**Finding:** Target met.

**Analysis:** In 2019-2020, the target was to increase social media engagement by 15 percent. Based on the analysis of these results in 2020-2021, additional resources were placed on media engagement. The addition of a videographer (Zachary Breaux) and his successful video campaigns, presented in tandem with social media campaigns,

Video/social media campaigns boosted social media engagement by reaching over 3.1 million unique users on Facebook and nearly 754,000 unique users on Instagram. During this time, the social media engagement was driven by the 2 million impressions on Instagram and nearly 6 million impressions on Facebook as followers grew and shared content generated by Marketing and Branding across social media platforms.

As a result, the target was met.

From July 2020 - March 2021, Facebook fan growth increased by 2,408 users; total likes were 37,854. Instagram followers increased by 8.35 percent. In June 2021, Instagram followers grew to over 20,000. The current number of Twitter followers is 8,333.

Based on the analysis of the results from last year, data indicates that planning social media campaigns in conjunction with campus activities, events and holidays made a positive impact in social media engagement. Data also indicates that social media played an important and impactful role in communicating with the university’s constituents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Action - Decision or Recommendation:** Based on the analysis of the 2020-2021 results, Marketing and Branding in 2021-2022 will strategically plan social media campaigns in conjunction with activities, events and holidays, in addition to consistent

## AC 2020-2021 Assessment

planned posts regarding health and safety measures enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 hurricane season and other weather events. Marketing and Branding will continue to explore emerging social media platforms and measure their effectiveness towards advancing the university's mission.

**SO 2.** Public Information/Media Relations and Marketing and Branding support the university's internal and external communication efforts to increase brand recognition and impact.

### **Measure 2.1.**

Each unit monitors earned media, growth of network, video views, website hits and other analytics with the goal of a 15 percent annually to demonstrate increased engagement and interest in NSU.

**Finding:** Target met.

**Analysis:** Video/social media campaigns boosted social media engagement by reaching over 3.1 million unique users on Facebook and nearly 754,000 unique users on Instagram. During this time, the social media engagement was driven by the 2 million impressions on Instagram and nearly 6 million impressions on Facebook as followers grew and shared content generated by Marketing and Branding across social media platforms.

From July 2020 - March 2021, Facebook fan growth increased by 2,408 users; total likes were 37,854. Instagram followers increased by 8.35 percent. In June 2021, Instagram followers grew to over 20,000. The current number of Twitter followers is 8,333.

Based on the analysis of the results, additional resources were placed on media engagement and brand recognition 2019-20. As a result, in 2020-21 units used analytic tools to measure engagement and will continue to market the university's programming.

The units use Meltwater and social media analytics to measure engagement. Engagement was healthy in 2019-2020. The unit hired a new videographer, Zachary Breaux, whose excellent work greatly enhanced NSU's presence on social media for many different occasions, programming and recruiting/retention endeavors as well as informational support during COVID-19, hurricane recovery and ice storm recovery.

Spikes in social media/external media engagement tend occur in conjunction with campus events that follow the academic calendar, such as Freshman Connection, Welcome Week, Christmas Gala, Commencement, and other large campus events. This was true as constituents followed NSU social media during COVID-19 pandemic.

NSU Press, NSU Publications and University Printing continue to support units across campus. From July 2020-June 2021, NSU Publications completed 845 jobs for a variety of units and divisions across campus. Because many events were cancelled during the

## AC 2020-2021 Assessment

COVID-19 pandemic, Publications marked a decrease in normal workflow. Two new staff members joined the team following a retirement of long-time director of publications and her assistant. The new staff members have shown willingness to learn and great flexibility while working remotely in spring 2020 and returned to work in the office in August 2020. Jobs completed by University Printing fell when administration required the Print Shop to desist from printing outside jobs. New regulations were adopted that prohibit the printing for private groups and organizations unrelated to NSU.

**Action - Decision or Recommendation:** Based on the analysis of 2020-2021 results, personnel showed great fortitude in completing projects while working remotely during modified working operations.

**SO 3.** PI&MR and Marketing and Branding stay current on trends in media and promote an atmosphere of teamwork and collaboration.

### Measure 3.1.

Units attend at least one (more when feasible) professional development conference or webinar per year to sustain quality in writing, editing, graphic design photography, videography and other communication arts and to monitor pertinent trends in the industry.

**Finding:** This goal was not met.

**Analysis:** In 2019-20 the target was to attend at least one professional development conference per year. Workshops were cancelled due to COVID-19.

Engaging in professional development increases enthusiasm, team-building and generates ideas for increasing engagement and media relations. As a result, in 2020-2021 the target was not met. Most personnel worked remotely for several months. This was especially challenging for new employees who, while emailing and teleconferencing, formed no team relationships until the university reopened following the pandemic.

**Action** – Based on the analysis of 2020-2021 results, in 2021-2022 units will seek professional development opportunities through the University of Louisiana System and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, as well as with inter-office teambuilding and strategic planning.

### Measure 3.2.

The units will hold weekly meetings to discuss projects and their progress and share information relevant to completing projects in a professional manner and a timely fashion. Success is defined as meeting 100 percent of deadlines and producing quality work with 0 percent errors.

**Finding:** This goal was not met. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, personnel utilized Zoom and Webex, which is less than ideal for exchange of creative ideas.

## AC 2020-2021 Assessment

**Analysis:** In 2019-2020 the target was to meet weekly to discuss projects and their progress. Based on the analysis of these results in 2020-2021, personnel completed projects independently and through online communications. As a result in 2019-2020 the target was still not met.

**Action** – Based on the analysis of the 2020-2021 results, the units will set regular meeting times to share ideas and facilitate projects being completed in a professional manner and a timely fashion for 2021-2022.

### Comprehensive summary of key evidence of improvement based on analysis of results:

- Personnel targeted press releases to specific markets and observed spikes of interested related to Athletics, Recruiting and commencement initiatives. In addition, staff maintained a proactive approach in reaching out to media to “pitch” story ideas to relevant markets.
- New personnel were hired in Marketing/Branding and NSU Publications and as a result we have witnessed a positive impact on unit productivity even during the COVID pandemic.
- The units worked together and with other units on campus on strategic initiatives and campaigns to increase social media engagement and crisis communication.
- Unit heads pursued professional development opportunities as they become available.
- Although working remotely the units continued to complete projects in a timely manner and will develop better teamwork now that the pandemic is over.

### Plan of action moving forward.

Public Information & Media Relations and Marketing and Branding work with internal and external stakeholders to promote the image of Northwestern State, viewing their roles as critical in vaulting Northwestern State to becoming the nation’s premier regional university. Though staffs are small and resources are limited, each team member exhibits dedication to the quality of their product and to the reputation of the university. The units will continue to reach out to media to pitch story ideas and continue to target markets with relevant content.

Because technology and media platforms continue to evolve, the team is challenged to stay current and relevant to several different demographics and fluent in technology to utilize traditional and non-traditional media platforms.

The team will attend at least two professional development workshops/conferences and active engage in teambuilding and strategic planning.