



## COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING PLAN

Presented at the Early Fall 2007 Meeting of the Board of Trustees  
Friday, September 28, 2007

Fall semester 2007 provides an opportunity to build a foundation for a central university communications structure that reflects current realities and evolving needs—now that the presidential leadership is settled, the bulk of the communications units now clustered under one umbrella, and with fundamental changes coming to AU’s Web communications platform. Change is overdue, as the overall structure, components, and staffing have not been fundamentally examined or repositioned in a “big picture sense” in the past 12 years.

As the Board of Trustees considers a new committee to help guide the university’s outreach and communications efforts, please consider the following descriptions of the management system we intend to put in place.

### Functions and Organization

Based on our needs and after comparing structures for communications and marketing at other universities, four primary functions should be consolidated under the oversight of a senior executive director. (This structure also mirrors the recommendations from our Web communications consultant, following their assessment earlier this year).

- Marketing and Advertising—Build a viable marketing and advertising component that continues to assist the university and units with specific advertising needs yet is “big picture” in scope to direct effective and consistent university imaging more broadly conceived. Conducting market research on an ongoing basis will be a component.
- Media Relations—Embellish our current program of media outreach, placement, and external news media relations by working with the schools and units to meet their targeted needs, while coordinating the overarching university presence. The volume of activity is already heavy; the challenge is to assist the schools and units with their individualized needs.
- Publications and Periodicals—Envision our program of publications design (creative services) and print periodicals production with an eye on maintaining publications and periodicals with purpose—while assessing the future of design collaborations and information delivery via electronic or Web communications means.

- Web Communications—Build a strong Web communications component that fully embraces the promise and potential of Web 2.0 technology and interactive communications, with an eye on future changes and adaptations.

The clustering of communications under a senior official will facilitate the integration of main messages, symbols, graphic identity, Web strategy, Internet presence, media presence, and advertising. The individual units would be managed by directors reporting to the senior official; the senior official will report to the president. The President's Council will serve as a reinforcing mechanism linking this new office to the other major units of the university.

### **Coordination and Collaboration**

A number of considerations will be important for this reorganization:

- Strategic Plan—It will be essential to translate the fundamental components and message points emanating from the new strategic plan, utilizing this as a message platform for positioning AU and its distinctive traits for our various audiences. The new strategic planning exercise and resulting “main messages” and “branding” concepts are very much needed for coherent and cohesive messaging.
- Working Relationships—We will forge effective and efficient working relationships between the central functions and the communications and marketing resources in the schools and colleges and other major units, such as athletics, campus life, and development.
- Campus Models—The inter-organizational model we will seek to reproduce is the one currently in place for fund-raising and alumni relations.
- Admissions and Student Recruitment—We will focus on consistent messaging and collaborations for undergraduate student recruitment (between central communications and enrollment services) and graduate student recruitment (between central communications and the schools).
- Web—Our future communications and marketing efforts will build on existing “traditional” mediums, while more fully expanding into and utilizing Web communications and concepts of Web 2.0 “shared voice” or interactive communication. We are currently embarking on an effort to reinvigorate our Web platform and transition our communications to more effectively be part of the open information environment that is embraced by growing numbers of our consumers (including current and potential students) and which is dramatically altering institutional communications and marketing concepts.
- Community and Governmental Relations—These functions will not be managed by the new executive director but by the president's chief of staff. Coordination with these important and sensitive areas, currently dominated by work related to the Army Corps of Engineers, will be a major priority of the new office, however.
- Metrics—We will establish measurement objectives and parameters to chart our progress in marketing and communication.

The role of the board's proposed committee is important, particularly in light of the expertise of individual trustees. Goal-setting and measurement of progress in this area is especially challenging. Review of overall messaging and advertising strategies, other forms of outreach, and our aggressive program to upgrade our presence on and use of the Web are among the areas where board help will be sought. Also, the board can provide guidance on how to identify and take maximum advantage of opportunities for better government relations.