

2020 ADMISSIONS CYCLE

# MARKETING PLAN

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THE OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS FOR ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

**I** ILLINOIS

## **SUMMARY**

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First and foremost, this plan lays out a series of goals for the 2020 admissions cycle based on key objectives from the Office of Admissions in addition to long-term campus branding goals.

Secondly, we present key messages and target audiences. With an increased focus on directed communications, personalization, and authenticity, we aim to boost applications from underrepresented students, high-achievers, and other important segments.

Finally, we outline how new communications and marketing projects will be able to expand Admissions outreach efforts to our targets.

This plan is intended to help increase coordination between Admissions marketing strategy and the strategy of units across campus. In this way, we can leverage our resources and efforts across a decentralized campus by honing in on key messages and removing duplicated efforts.

Our overall marketing strategy will attempt to build on new audience research and our statewide Illinois Commitment campaign. We look forward to working with our campus partners in new ways this year and seeing the results of our efforts.

## **GOALS**

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### **CLASS COMPOSITION**

- Maintain size and excellence of class
- Continue diversifying class
- Focus on Illinois residents (especially downstate)
- Grow mid-range income population
- Increase applications
- Maintain or improve yield rate
- Grow and strengthen out-of-state reputation

The Office of Undergraduate Admissions articulates explicit goals about class composition. The Office of Communications assists in meeting these goals through its integrated marketing strategy and coordinated communication efforts with campus partners.

### **BRANDING & COMMUNICATIONS**

- Increase relevancy of content
- Focus on authentic content
- Improve parent focus across communications
- Build brand awareness and reputation

More than other age groups, Generation Z is used to content being highly personal and relevant to them.<sup>1</sup> Our strategy is to use dynamic content to direct appropriate messages to targeted student populations (i.e., “a great microuban community” to Chicago students, “a welcoming environment” to international students, etc.).

When it comes to authenticity, being in touch with our audience is the top priority. Creating authentic content that provides a window into student life at Illinois is critical to our marketing strategy.

Our communications will reinforce positive perceptions found in the Bauman brand study performed for the university last year.<sup>2</sup> The study shows that prospective students associate Illinois with “team player,” “good guy,” and “visionary” organization personality types. Specific brand

messaging will maintain a light touch until further direction on a campus-wide brand platform is established by the Chief Marketing Officer.

Parents make up a large and growing part of our audience.<sup>3</sup> Data shows that parents increasingly sign up for college communications (90%) and even apply to colleges on behalf of their child (62%).<sup>4</sup> While our communications always put students first, parents are considered a strong secondary audience and will be treated as such in our strategy.

## **CAMPUS VISITS**

- Showcase the best Illinois has to offer
- Make a compelling case for students to apply and enroll
- Periodically evaluate the overall visit experience

### **Four improvements for campus visits in the 2020 cycle:**

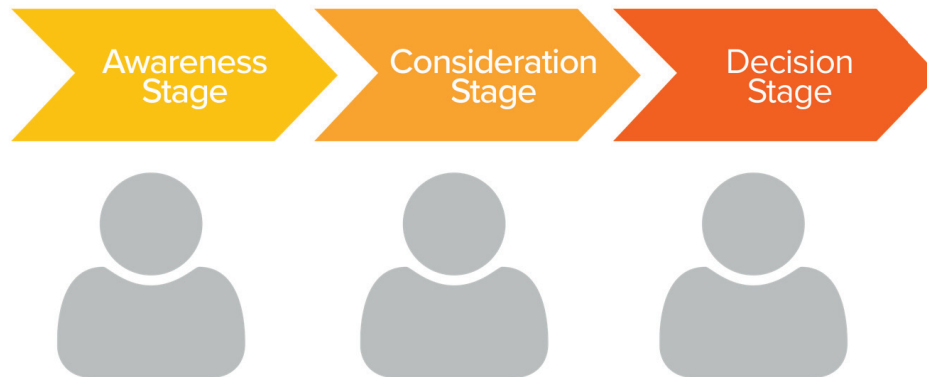
1. Redesign visit surveys to improve consistency and data collection
2. Evaluate competing institutions to compare visit experiences
3. Hire a Communications Coordinator to improve behind-the-scenes visit functions within Admissions
4. Troubleshoot any issues that exist in the Illinois campus visit experience

Using survey data gathered during the 2020 cycle, the Office of Communications will prepare a visit recommendation plan for the 2021 cycle to further improve the visit experience at Illinois.

## MESSAGING & AUDIENCES

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### MESSAGING THROUGH THE ADMISSIONS DECISION PROCESS



*Figure 1 - The admissions decision process.*

As students move through the admissions funnel from prospects to inquiries to applicants, messaging will change. Each stage of the funnel corresponds to a decision stage, so messaging will focus on those associated decision points.

While students are in the awareness stage (sophomores and juniors), they will receive content aimed at helping them explore universities and academic interest areas. Awareness-stage content is built around the idea that Illinois can be a resource as students explore schools and programs they might be interested in.<sup>5</sup>

In the consideration stage (juniors and seniors), students are assumed to be actively exploring a narrowed list of universities or interest areas. In this stage, exploration content should transition throughout the year to marketing content about Illinois.

At the decision stage (seniors), content should focus on Illinois and the application and enrollment process, much like it does now. At this point, we should assume that students have decided where they will apply or have completed applications and are actively making their college choice from a list of schools that includes Illinois.

In the 2020 cycle, we will expand efforts to personalize and differentiate communications as students move from prospect to inquiry to applicant.

## KEY AUDIENCES

In order to achieve enrollment goals, these segments will receive increased marketing and communications attention in the 2020 cycle:

- Underrepresented minority students
- Illinois high school students (focus on downstate)
- Middle-income students
- Out-of-state domestic students
- High-achieving students
- Transfer students
- Parents

## LEAD ACQUISITION

Prospective student names will be acquired through a mix of traditional name buys, organic inquiries, and advertising. Improving our lead-generation strategies has become increasingly necessary with increased competition, an evolving audience, desire for a stronger out-of-state presence, and a focus on increasing diversity on campus. Continued effort will be made to partner with colleges to include their lead acquisitions into our overall pool.

## NEW COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING METHODS

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Admissions and the Office of Communications already host many on- and off-campus events and send several communications specific to targeted groups each year. However, more work is needed to meet new class goals, including the recruitment of underrepresented students.<sup>6</sup>

1. **Increased and targeted communications.** This includes digital advertising, increased direct mail flow, texting, content marketing, and more. Each of these efforts will be specifically tailored to the target group, making it more effective. We will add dynamic content unique to these groups in messages about campus life, Champaign-Urbana, and relevant student experiences.
2. **Advertising.** We will target underrepresented minority students, downstate students, and middle-income students through online and social media advertising. This is a key component of our broader advertising and search strategy.

3. **Compelling content.** This means increasing the quality of print pieces to make sure they are memorable as well as ensuring emails are relevant, important, and personal to the target audience. Adding new photo and video projects will create compelling online content.
4. **Content marketing.** New content marketing efforts will create general college search resources to help our current audience and attract a new audience to engage with Illinois Admissions. This strategy will reinforce positive brand attributes while building a new audience to cultivate.
5. **Storytelling.** A new effort to gather and showcase the Illinois experience through the vehicle of storytelling will give our messaging more impact, making it easy for students to imagine themselves on campus. Capturing these stories in photo and video will make them even more compelling and sharable, especially with the addition of a new student story microsite and an improved blog site to showcase student-generated content.
6. **Key Messages for Admissions.** Admissions communications will remain focused on campus-wide messaging. We will hone in on the application process, academics and rankings, location and community, campus life, and success.
7. **Key Messages for campus units.** We will encourage colleges and other campus units to focus on key messages that separate themselves from the whole of Illinois. For most colleges, this is a focus on unique academics, post-graduate success and rankings, and differentiating experiences.

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1 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinessdevelopmentcouncil/2018/02/22/13-strategies-for-marketing-to-generation-z/#4020786131c3>

2 Bauman 2018, pg. 72

3 Mongoose Parental Communication Guide 2018

4 Mongoose Parents Communication 2018, pg. 3

5 <https://www.ecityinteractive.com/blog/understanding-the-applicants-journey/>

6 "African American Recruitment and Admissions Efforts," Andy Borst, 2018