

**Case Study:
Market Illumination
Market Landscape**

State University System



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Background

- East Carolina University, ECU, was embarking on a major marketing initiative. As their first step, they wanted to conduct market research to assist in developing an on-target marketing plan.
- Specifically, ECU was looking to understand the perceptions and attitudes towards ECU of critical populations.

Objectives

The research was designed to better understand critical populations' perceptions of ECU through:

- surfacing the sources and drivers of perceptions towards educational institutions, and
- comparing and contrasting perceptions of ECU with competitive educational institutions.

In addition this research was to establish a baseline to serve as:

- a starting point for communications,
- a point for future measurement and comparisons, and
- to gather fodder for messaging and stimulus for the creative aspects of communication development.

Methodology

- Multiple survey methods including internet and focus groups were employed to gather the perceptions and attitudes of critical populations.
- The critical populations included in this research were: ECU undergraduates, prospective undergraduates, parents of prospective undergraduates, business employers, high school guidance counselors, and stakeholders such as policymakers, board of trustees, faculty and staff.
- This research covered multiple states: those from which ECU currently pulls students as well as states targeted for expansion.



Summary of Findings

Survey Findings	Actions Taken
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall the research surfaced effective ways to communicate with each segment of the population. Commonalities and differences were effectively illustrated in the final report allowing ECU to develop and finely tune a communication plan for each audience. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECU does not “suffer” from a negative reputation but rather from “no reputation.” i.e. All competitive educational institutions “own” the “party school” reputation to varying degrees. However, most educational institutions had an additional positive, more powerful attribute to supersede the common “party school” attribute. Research surfaced a <i>weak</i> but persistent reputation for being easy to get into which, unchecked could contribute to a negative perception. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECU immediately took advantage of their “clean slate” and embarked on an aggressive messaging campaign. It was determined a strong marketing campaign would override the current weak reputation for easy admission.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eight elements comprised the <i>academic reputation</i> evaluation. These were found to be dominant influential attributes contributing to the formation of perceptions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECU used these academic reputation elements in the formation of the concepts and messages driving their communication efforts.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For each population, in-depth exploration surfaced key <i>emotive drivers</i> relative to the development of perceptions of educational institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECU marketing leveraged the key emotive drivers in their creative development resulting in communication centered on emotive triggers—targeted to each relevant population. Such as <i>Success Stories of Alumni</i>. This emotive trigger spoke effectively to business owners as well as prospective students and parents. While <i>Involvement in the Community</i> was an emotional trigger point for policy makers and parents.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploration of related topics such as business owner’s expectations of newly hired graduates, surfaced additional contributors to the development of a positive reputation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elements such as <i>independent thinkers, team players, professional/mannered. etc.</i> provided relevant building blocks for additional communication concept development among the general population.

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