

Defining our Image for the Next 50 Years

Communications and Reputation at UC Santa Cruz

Background

Every university has a story to tell about itself, but the difference between a good story and a great story is the way you tell it.

Established in 1965 on progressive principles, UC Santa Cruz offers something that is uncommon in public higher education in the United States: a liberal arts education in the context of a major research university. The structural diversity of this campus—its colleges, divisions, departments, and programs—is UC Santa Cruz’s boldest innovation in higher education and its greatest strength.

In the five decades since the University opened its doors to the public, the scholarly research, creative activity, and scientific discoveries of our world-class faculty have grown in scope, consequence, and prestige. Yet, as stakeholders from across campus told us repeatedly, the story of our achievements is not well known.

The celebration of our fiftieth anniversary is close at hand. The public phase of the comprehensive campaign has been launched, and a new Vice Chancellor for University Relations is starting his work. *Now* is the time—a time that we have not had before and will not have again—to choose how we want to represent ourselves, and to do it in a way that brings our diverse aspirations and achievements together in one story that clearly connects the visionary audacity of our beginnings to a future of limitless, brilliant possibilities.

Trends and External Picture

Many comparable universities (e.g. UC Davis and UCSB) employ a centralized communications strategy that unites public relations, development, and internal communications—often coordinated by an Associate Vice Chancellor for Strategic Communications who reports directly to the Chancellor. These schools devote considerably more staff resources to internal and external communications than ours, striving to achieve the following through their communications profile:

- a unified, up-to-date graphic design for all online and print communications
- a dynamic online presence at all levels, including admissions, academic departments, alumni, and public events
- a central online campus events calendar for students, faculty, staff and members of the community

- dynamic, regularly updated campus webpages, e-newsletters, e-calendars, Facebook pages, and Twitter accounts
- a significant presence on social media
- online “toolboxes” for campus communicators
- easily searchable online access to campus faculty experts for journalists and media
- comprehensive data-collection and reporting to leverage information, improve stakeholder engagement, and to enhance decision making, marketing, and communication strategies

Other universities have sought to clarify the direction in which they intend to grow by harking back to past achievements. For UC Santa Cruz, a legacy of progressive teaching and research and of activism in the fields of social justice and environmental sustainability might well define the University’s image going forward.

Strategic Themes

Many stakeholders cited communication and reputation as areas in which UC Santa Cruz could improve. We have identified several specific areas that could be addressed.

(1) Creating a Recognizable Brand. A unified communications strategy would greatly enhance UC Santa Cruz’s ability to connect with prospective students and their parents and teachers; to cultivate a sense of shared identity and school spirit among current students, faculty, and staff; to inform alumni about the life of the University and involve them in its future; and to explain the value of our work to politicians, government agencies, and philanthropists. Without a strategy and a recognizable brand, we risk squandering unprecedented opportunities for growth and development, including the Comprehensive Campaign, the fiftieth anniversary, and the proximity of Silicon Valley.

- **UC Santa Cruz must develop a strategic plan for Communications with clearly articulated goals for individual units and the campus as a whole. Without one, we will be unable to enjoy the full benefits of our reputation for innovative teaching and research or reach our enrollment and fundraising goals.**

One modest idea for improvement in our communications strategy is to abandon the use of “UCSC” in favor of “UC Santa Cruz” in all official documents and published communications. The acronym UCSC is not nationally (or even in many cases, locally) recognized, and it often leads to confusion with University of Southern California or Santa Clara University. “UC Santa Cruz” is a name that

unambiguously refers to our campus, and through it we can define an image that speaks for all of us.

(2) Increasing our Web Presence. Our website should clearly and memorably communicate the variety of our intellectual life, the value of the work we do, and the excitement of living, working, and learning here. It should change and grow in relation to new information and advances in website design.

Website content should be evaluated with an eye toward marketing and utility: Will prospective undergraduate and graduate students be attracted to our university by what they find on the site, and will they obtain concrete information helpful in convincing them to attend UC Santa Cruz? Furthermore, the aesthetic appeal and modernity of our website design should be considered with such an audience in mind. Finally, divisions, departments, and individual faculty must have flexibility and direction for updating their websites with new content.

- **UC Santa Cruz should maintain, design, and add content to cohesively designed websites that reflect a unified brand. Individual departments and faculty should have greater flexibility to update sites with current content.**

(3) Publicizing Faculty Research.

- **UC Santa Cruz should evaluate the mechanism through which the research breakthroughs of its faculty are publicized. We should strive to create an efficient and consistent process through which cutting-edge work receives publicity in a timely and widely-distributed manner.**

(4) Publicize the University Nationally and Internationally. Every chance to publicize must be exploited thoughtfully and productively. Whether the occasion is high-profile (the presentation of the National Medal of Science to a professor at UC Santa Cruz or the publication of a full-page advertisement in a national newspaper or magazine) or local (faculty lectures, exhibitions and concerts, or other public programs), no opportunity to demonstrate and explain the importance of the work being done on this campus should be missed. Clearly and consistently improving our reputation will allow us to reach a number of fundamental goals more quickly: recruiting exceptional domestic and international students; recruiting outstanding faculty and graduate students; attracting the private philanthropy that will be vital for growth and development; and forming partnerships with businesses and entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley.

- **In order to take full advantage of every opportunity to build a national and international reputation of excellence, UC Santa Cruz should integrate its marketing plan into the broader plan for strategic communication that we called for earlier.**

(5) Improving Internal Communications. Stakeholders agree that the campus needs new mechanisms for sharing information and promoting collaborations across

colleges and divisions. The campus has very recently introduced a University-wide Events Calendar which should be further developed and advertised. All units should also have greater flexibility in updating and modifying their own websites through a marketing toolbox, allowing well-informed content experts to take responsibility for promoting their units within the unified design framework of a coherent campus identity.

- **UC Santa Cruz should further develop and advertise the University Events Calendar and create a toolbox of web-building resources for faculty and staff in order to facilitate communication across campus and with the local community.**

(6) Engaging our Community. Faculty, staff, students, and alumni from UC Santa Cruz devote an extremely large number of person-hours to volunteering and working to improve our local community. Furthermore, many faculty members conduct research that is of practical value to those living in surrounding communities. However, our efforts in these regards are not widely publicized and are, consequently, underappreciated.

- **UC Santa Cruz should engage further with the local community, publicize our work benefiting the community, and promote the value of a UC Santa Cruz degree and research partnerships. This process would involve deciding how to define “our community” and expanding and strengthening our ties with it.**

Accomplishments/Opportunities

The many and diverse accomplishments of UC Santa Cruz students, faculty and staff provide opportunities for enhancing our reputation. Here is a partial list of achievements for which we are not well known but should be:

Student Experience

- We have a deep commitment to undergraduate education and experiential learning; UC Santa Cruz is the only public university in the United States with residential colleges that offer formal instruction.
- We have a high percentage of first-generation college-goers and are on the verge of become a Hispanic Serving Institution.
- Women Engineering students outnumber those in many comparable programs.
- We are ranked #14 on Campus Pride’s list of LGBT-friendly campuses in 2013.

Innovation and Research

- We have pioneered fields like Agroecology and are home to innovative new programs like Computer Game Design.
- We have the first Latin American and Latino Studies doctoral program in the nation.
- We have enormous research influence, ranked #2 for research influence by the Times Higher Education World University Rankings.
- We have highly-ranked programs in Astronomy and Astrophysics, Computer Game Design, Linguistics, Human Genomics, and many other fields.

Leadership and Activism

- Our faculty conduct pioneering research in fields of social justice such as prison reform, environmental action, feminism, queer studies, and racial equality.
- We have won many awards for sustainability.
- Our faculty, staff, students, and alumni have a culture of service that extends not only into our local community but to the world.
- For the past twelve years UC Santa Cruz has consistently ranked among the top 25 universities sending volunteers to the Peace Corps.

The Next Fifty Years

Implementing a communications and branding strategy that articulates the depth, breadth, and quality of our achievements would create a rich archive of specific examples that demonstrate the value and consequence of studying at UC Santa Cruz. It would also increase morale by providing opportunities for everyone's role and contribution to be acknowledged and valued. As we noted earlier, the public phase of the Comprehensive Campaign has been launched. A new Vice Chancellor for University Relations has been appointed. The date of the fiftieth anniversary is fast approaching. Any one of these developments would be a reason for self-reflection in the life of a university. The fact that they are all occurring at the same time makes this moment unique in our history. It is critical that we use this moment wisely, and decisive action is needed in order to improve our communications, define our brand, and set our course for the next fifty years.