

2018

## Marketing Plan for Columbus State University

Kaylyn Cockrell

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MARKETING PLAN FOR COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

Kaylyn Cockrell  
2018



COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

MARKETING PLAN FOR COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE

HONORS COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR HONORS IN THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING DEPARTMENT

D. ABBOTT TURNER COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

BY

KAYLYN COCKRELL

## ABSTRACT

Marketing is an important tool for capturing customers and sales in business, and it's equally as important to an institution like Columbus State University (CSU) aiming to capture student customers. The development of a marketing plan through extensive research and planning will contribute to the success of all involved marketing efforts. This marketing plan will include all the standard essential elements: business mission statement, situation (SWOT) analysis, objectives, marketing strategy, implementation, evaluation, and control. The mission statement, the current statement from the 2018-2023 Strategic Plan, will be used. The situation analysis will include looking at the current strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats of CSU. Based on this analysis, the objectives of the marketing plan will be created. The marketing strategy will include development of the target market strategy and the marketing mix. Target market strategy will consist of segmentation, targeting, and positioning while the marketing mix is made up of product, price, place, and promotion. An action plan will be developed to implement the marketing plan, and evaluation and control methods will be planned. The proposed plan would increase student enrollment and brand awareness of CSU.

INDEX WORDS: Columbus State University, Marketing Plan



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Marketing is an important tool for capturing customers and sales in business, and it's equally as important to an institution like Columbus State University (CSU) aiming to capture student customers. The development of a marketing plan through extensive research and planning will contribute to the success of all involved marketing efforts. This marketing plan will include all the standard essential elements: business mission statement, situation (SWOT) analysis, objectives, marketing strategy, implementation, and evaluation control. For the mission statement, the current statement from the 2018-2023 Strategic Plan will be used. The situation analysis will include looking at the current strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats of CSU. Based on this analysis, the objectives of the marketing plan will be created. The marketing strategy will include development of the target market strategy and the marketing mix. Target market strategy will consist of segmentation, targeting, and positioning while the marketing mix is made up of product, price, place, and promotion. An action plan will be developed to implement the marketing plan, and evaluation and control methods will be planned. The proposed plan would increase student enrollment and brand awareness of CSU.

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## **Mission, Vision, and Values of Columbus State University**

As identified in the 2018-2023 Strategic Plan, Columbus State University's (CSU) mission, vision, and values are as follows:

### ***Mission***

Columbus State University will empower individuals to contribute to the advancement of local and global communities through an emphasis on excellence in teaching and research, lifelong learning, cultural enrichment, public/private partnerships and service to other.

### ***Vision***

Columbus State University will be a model of empowerment through transformational learning experiences that prepare students to serve the world as creative problem-solvers and high-impact leaders.

### ***Values***

**Excellence:** Commitment to best practices in teaching and learning, scholarship and creative activity, student engagement, cultural enrichment and campus environment.

**Creativity:** The pursuit of distinction through inquiry and innovation, challenging convention and focusing on solutions.

**Engagement:** Active civil participation by students, faculty, and staff in the university experience.

**Servant leadership:** Effective, ethical leadership through empowerment and service.

**Sustainability:** Commitment to behaviors that recognize and respect our environmental context.



Inclusion: Fostering and promoting a campus that embraces diverse people, ideas, views, and practices.

("Strategic Plan 2018-2023", 2018)

### SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis scans a company's current competitive environment through internal and external factors. Internal company strengths and weaknesses are compared against key competitors, and external environmental changes are examined for potential opportunities and threats. There are two external environments that must be examined: the macroenvironment and the microenvironment. The macroenvironment examines the total competitive environment, which consists of general economic conditions, changes to legislation and regulations, population demographics, societal values and lifestyles, and technology. The microenvironment, also known as the task or immediate environment, utilizes Porter's Five Forces, which determines the attractiveness of the industry's competitive environment. Porter's Five Forces consists of examining the threat of new entrants, bargaining power of buyers, threat of substitute products or services, bargaining power of suppliers, and the number of rival firms. All internal company functions, such as marketing, human resources, and information systems, are examined to determine the strengths and weaknesses from each. Combined, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats all makeup the SWOT analysis (*Mastering Strategic Management*, 2011).

During the development of the 2018-2023 Strategic Plan, the CSU Strategic Committee conducted a SWOT analysis. The prepared SWOT table, shown below, will be used in this marketing plan to determine objectives.



Table I

2016 SWOT Table (As of 10/6/16)

<b>CSU Strengths:</b>	<b>CSU Weaknesses:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supportive environment for teaching and learning as evidenced by committed faculty dedicated to teaching</li> <li>▪ Nationally accredited programs in business, education, music, theatre, art, nursing and chemistry</li> <li>▪ Competitive pricing compared to some larger USG institutions</li> <li>▪ Positive reputation in the local area</li> <li>▪ Robust Servant Leadership program</li> <li>▪ International Education grants and program opportunities</li> <li>▪ <b>Distinctive campuses creates a unique and diverse quality of student life</b></li> <li>▪ Increase in diversity within the student body (age, race, gender, ethnicity)</li> <li>▪ <b>Good "town-gown" relations and collaboration opportunities with local industry (in part due to CSU's unique outreach programs) i.e. Partnerships with local schools</b></li> <li>▪ Foundation assets</li> <li>▪ Safe campuses, comparatively, with professional police presence</li> <li>▪ Strong student support service (Career Center, Ace, Rec Center, Student Life, etc.)</li> <li>▪ Nice new or updated facilities (RiverPark, Clearview, Arnold, Labs)</li> <li>▪ Increase in online program offerings</li> <li>▪ Robust Honors program</li> <li>▪ Faculty Center for Professional Development</li> <li>▪ Faculty to student ratio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Small number of international students</li> <li>○ Heavy reliance on adjuncts in some key core courses (e.g., Math and English)</li> <li>○ Low student retention and graduation rates</li> <li>○ Limited out-of-state recruitment</li> <li>○ Lack of ranking nationally</li> <li>○ Lack of adequate resources to support faculty research</li> <li>○ Lack of funding/quality of some of the facilities, classroom instructional technology, equipment replacement/repair</li> <li>○ Lack of coherence and communication among the different campus communities</li> <li>○ Faculty and staff salaries and training below average --lack of adequate employee training and professional development in key service areas</li> <li>○ Declining cohesiveness and increased operational costs of dual campuses and outreach operations</li> <li>○ Reliance upon unit-level generated revenues increases vulnerability/exposure to revenue declines which may cause future faculty/staff layoffs and program inequities</li> <li>○ Lack of attention to measurements of institutional effectiveness</li> <li>○ Core classes involve large allocations of resources and availability is poor</li> <li>○ <b>Lack of funding for the holistic student (Health &amp; Wellness)</b></li> <li>○ Lack of structures and policies to support interdisciplinary efforts</li> <li>○ Lack of engagement of online students</li> <li>○ Desire/demand for growth exceeds resources</li> <li>○ Diversity among faculty/staff is low in comparison to student body</li> <li>○ Foundation liabilities</li> <li>○ Lack of well-defined system for policy development and approval</li> <li>○ <b>Lack of brand visibility/awareness/value</b></li> </ul>

("CSU SWOT Table", 2016)

*Blue = item could be a differentiator for CSU (positive or negative)*



Table I.2

2016 SWOT Table (As of 10/6/16)

<b>Opportunities:</b>	<b>Threats:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase in the global demand for online/hybrid courses and programs</li> <li>▪ Global mobility of students, services, and trade creates opportunities for international student recruitment and study abroad programs</li> <li>▪ Fastest growing jobs in U.S. in the next decade will be related to healthcare, education, technology, and business</li> <li>▪ Growth in the demand for professional certificates/modules that are "stackable" for degree completion</li> <li>▪ Growth in the demand for graduate degrees</li> <li>▪ Growth in STEM-related occupations (science, technology, engineering, math) in the U.S.</li> <li>▪ <b>Ft. Benning creates opportunities for new programs/students in that area</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Continue to build on CSU's positive relations with the community through current outreach programs and initiatives</b></li> <li>▪ Opportunity to increase enrollment by adding more relationship-building activities for applicants</li> <li>▪ Geographic location and close proximity to Fortune 500 companies</li> <li>▪ Grow student research programs/opportunities and grants</li> <li>▪ Continue to grow on-campus student engagement</li> <li>▪ Increased focused on soft-skills training (for students, faculty/staff through LEADCSU, community through outreach programs)</li> <li>▪ Increase collegiality amongst faculty, staff, across colleges and departments</li> <li>▪ Capacity to support distance learning comparable to sister institutions</li> <li>▪ Increase recruitment locally</li> <li>▪ Increase internship opportunities and student participation in them</li> <li>▪ Create more awareness around high quality programs</li> <li>▪ Add inter-professional education (IPE) opportunities</li> <li>▪ Helping students translate degrees in non-technical majors such as the Arts, Humanities, Liberal Arts, and Social Sciences to the job market</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Down economy and the resulting increased focus on college costs by students (increases in student fees may lead to a decline in enrollment)</li> <li>○ Loss of funding or reduction in student fees could negatively impact student enrollment and retention (creates inability to offer and sustain student programs and activities)</li> <li>○ <b>Continued reductions in financial aid/support for students and universities (e.g., Pell, HOPE, etc.)</b></li> <li>○ National shortage of PhD-qualified faculty in some disciplines increases the cost of hiring</li> <li>○ Fast-paced changes in technology increases operational costs due to constant replacement of classroom equipment and training faculty/staff</li> <li>○ Continual budget reductions due to declining federal/state appropriations (in part due to low student retention/graduation rates)</li> <li>○ Legislative impacts on alternative teacher certification programs (bypassing traditional college education programs)</li> <li>○ Peer institutions continue to compete for top undergraduate students by offering Honors programs and scholarships</li> <li>○ Perceived cost/benefit of higher education is declining</li> <li>○ Increased reporting requirements on departments which increases administrative costs</li> <li>○ Decline in funds for both students and universities</li> <li>○ External political environment (FLSA)</li> <li>○ <b>E-core/E-major</b></li> <li>○ Increased competition for online programs</li> <li>○ Uncertainty with USG leadership (Chancellor retiring)</li> <li>○ <b>Continued University consolidations</b></li> </ul>

("CSU SWOT Table", 2016)

Blue = item could be a differentiator for CSU (positive or negative)



## Marketing Objectives

### Objective 1

To increase CSU's brand visibility/awareness/value with students and parents in existing CSU markets by 20% by 2023.

Identified as a weakness in the SWOT Table, the first objective of this marketing plan aims to increase CSU's brand power. Brand visibility is how often a company's branding is seen (Levy, 2014). Not only does this include the logo, but visibility includes any component of branding that the company has established. Brand awareness is "the degree of consumer awareness of a brand and its related products" (Investopedia, 2018). In CSU's case, this would mean identifying the university and the degrees offered. Brand value is essentially the "sum total of how much extra people will pay, or how often they choose, the expectations, memories, stories and relationships of one brand over the alternatives" (Godin, 2009). Without these three branding elements, marketing efforts are ineffective. If students are not able to see CSU's branding, they will not connect any of the information they are receiving to the university. With low brand awareness, students will not remember information they previously received because they aren't connecting the different marketing pieces to the same university. Most importantly, brand value drives applications and enrollment; when a student applies or enrolls to CSU, they value the brand over alternatives. By increasing these components of branding, CSU will be able to capture more engagement from the target market. This engagement will potentially drive more applications and higher enrollment numbers as students become aware of CSU and place more value on the university.



## Objective 2

To grow CSU's traditional first-year freshmen enrollment from CSU's current markets by 25% by the 2024 fall semester.

First-year traditional freshmen enrollment has fluctuated over the past five years, leading to inconsistent growth. Freshmen drive enrollment; the smaller an entering freshmen body becomes, the smaller enrollment will be as the entering freshmen continue working on their degree. To see continued success of CSU's retention and graduation rates, the number of enrolled freshmen needs to increase. Therefore, this will be the second objective. The tables below and on the following page show past trends of entering freshmen, as well as the goal enrollment numbers to reach the 25% increase objective.

*Table II - Trend of Applications, Acceptance, and Enrollment of Entering Freshmen*

Entering Freshmen	Applied	% Increase	Accepted	% Increase	Enrolled	% Increase
Fall 2014	2800	-	1489	-	931	-
Fall 2015	3140	12.14%	1693	13.70%	1021	9.67%
Fall 2016	3156	0.51%	1532	-9.51%	926	-9.30%
Fall 2017	3475	10.11%	1605	4.77%	958	3.46%
Fall 2018	3622	4.23%	2002	24.74%	1098	14.61%
	4 Year Change	29.36%	4 Year Change	34.45%	4 Year Change	17.94%

("CSU Facts & Figures 2018: Applications Received", 2018)

## Segments of CSU's Market

**High School Students** – From freshmen to seniors, most high school students are thinking about potential colleges. Each age group has a different level of interest than the other, though. Freshmen are just beginning to think about college, but no serious actions are usually taken at the time. A study of ninth-graders' perceptions of college did determine that 18% had talked to a



Table III - Projected Results of Marketing Plan

Actual Past Enrollment		
Entering Freshmen	Enrolled	% Increase
Fall 2013	1044	-
Fall 2014	931	-10.82%
Fall 2015	1021	9.67%
Fall 2016	926	-9.30%
Fall 2017	958	3.46%
Fall 2018	1098	14.61%
Projected Future Enrollment		
Entering Freshmen	Enrolled	% Increase
Fall 2019	1142	4%
Fall 2020	1188	4%
Fall 2021	1235	4%
Fall 2022	1285	4%
Fall 2023	1336	4%
Fall 2024	1389	4%
	6 Year Change	26.53%

("New Student Profile", 2018)

### Target Market Strategy

Columbus State University's market can be broken down into many different segments, but it is most efficient to segment based on age since this is the main factor driving applications.

#### Segments of CSU's Market

High School Students – From freshmen to seniors, most high school students are thinking about potential colleges. Each age group has a different level of interest than the other, though. Freshmen are just beginning to think about college, but no serious actions are usually taken at the time. A study of ninth-graders' perceptions of college did determine that 18% had talked to a



school counselor about college, 21% talked to a teacher, 53% talked to friends, 63% talked to their father, and 77% talked to their mother (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & NRCCUA & OmniUpdate & CollegeWeekLive, 2017). When a student signals interest, they are taking the next step in the college research process. The closer it gets to decision time, the more students start signaling interest. Many students start early; 51% of students signal interest during their sophomore year of school and 64% of students signal interest during their junior year (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & NRCCUA & OmniUpdate & CollegeWeekLive, 2017). For both sets of these students, the most popular way to do this is a request for information through the school website. By senior year, 74% of students have signaled their interest, with the most popular method being a campus visit (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & NRCCUA & OmniUpdate & CollegeWeekLive, 2017). These students are aged between 13, freshmen, and 18, seniors.

Parents of high school students – Parents play a crucial role in their students' lives, and many are viewed as friends and advisers rather than parents. More than 50% of students consult with their parents about decisions and consider their opinion and perspective extremely valuable (Seemiller, Grace, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial for a university to create a strong relationship with the both students and their parents. There are three age groups of parents. Adolescent parents are those who were less than 20 years old when the child was born. Early adulthood parents, those who were between the ages 20-30 when the child was born, is the second age group of this segment. The last group, mature adulthood parents, would be those who were older than 30 when the child was born. The age when a parent had the child can have significant impacts on the cognitive development and educational opportunities of that child. Adolescent parents have the most impact; just “two-thirds of children born to teen mothers earn a high school diploma compared to 81% of their peers with older parents” (National Conference of



State Legislatures, 2013). Most of these families cannot financially support a college education because “two-thirds of families started by teens are poor, and nearly one in four will depend on welfare within three years of a child’s birth” (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013). Children of early adulthood parents and mature adulthood parents prove to be more successful academically.

Adult undergraduate students – This segment consists of students who are older than traditional college students who are applying for an undergraduate degree. This could be either the first degree they are receiving, or an additional degree in a new field of study. The age range of this group would consist of those over the age of 25.

Adult graduate students – These students are applying to receive an advanced degree. They may have been undergraduate students at Columbus State University, or they may have received their undergraduate degree at another university. Some students may be applying immediately after completing their undergraduate degree, while others entered the workforce for a period of time and are now returning for their graduate degree. There are many reasons that motivate these students, but the most popular reason would be for career advancement and pay advances.

Of these segments, there are specific groups that will make up the target market of this marketing plan to align with the set objectives. These target customers are students who are mostly likely to apply to CSU, be accepted into the university, and enroll at CSU.

### ***Target Market***

The most important segment is high school students. Beyond their age, CSU should target students with a mid-range to upper level high school general point average (GPA). High ranking students are more likely to choose research-driven institutions because they usually have



academic goals that are greater than CSU's current degree program can offer. They are also more likely to be accepted into their first choice school with their outstanding GPA. Students with a GPA between 2.50-3.50 will be looking for a university that they are more likely to be accepted to. CSU should target these motivated and hard working students because they are more likely to be interested in a teaching-university. Below is a table showing a breakdown of the high school GPAs of first-year, traditional freshman students admitted for fall semester 2017, which shows that this same group of students with similar GPAs were the largest majority enrolling in CSU that semester:

*Table IV - Percent of Freshmen Students Within a Specified High School GPA Range*

GPA Range	# of Students	% of Total
4.00	77	5.36%
3.00-3.99	885	61.59%
2.50-2.99	307	21.36%
2.00-2.49	166	11.55%
1.00-1.99	2	0.14%
Total	1437	100%
<i>Average</i>	3.15	

("New Student Profile", 2018)

There are many different intentions high school students have when applying to a university. Self-determination theory (SDT) is based on "motivation, personality, and development" (Guiffreda, Lynch, Wall, Abel, 2013). This theory suggests that intrinsic motivation, which is satisfaction from an activity, paves a better path to learning than extrinsic motivation, which is achievement of an external reward. This aligns with Generation Z's motivations; as a group, they are not motivated by money or the need to be validated by others, which are both extrinsic motivations (Seemiller, Grace, 2016). Intrinsic motivation is found through autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The study defines each motivation as follows:



“Autonomy: occurs when students choose to become engaged in learning because the subject and activities are closely aligned with their interests and values. Competence: the need to test and challenge one’s abilities. Relatedness: the need to establish close, secure relationships with others.” (Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, Abel, 2013). These relationships include those with peers, faculty, and family and friends from home. While this specific study was analyzing the effects of intrinsic motivations on academic success, the three factors (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) can also affect the motivation of a high school student to enroll in a university. Some of these factors may play a stronger role in a student’s motivation than others, but they all have some role in a student’s motivation (Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, Abel, 2013).

Another way to look at a student’s motivation is to examine the types of influential factors. For students with parents who attended college and are from the US region, the four main influencers are society, career, self, and community. Society influences 29% of students; this group attends college because it is the norm and they feel it is expected of them to attend. This group also usually selects a prestigious, more expensive school compared to other influencer groups. The second largest influence is career, with 26% of students choosing to attend college with the hopes of entering into a specific profession or to earn money. These students are more likely to select a school based on the necessary academic program and degree track to achieve their goals. Students are also influenced by the self, which accounts for 23% of influence. Social and intellectual reasons drive this group’s choices, leading to personal choice and financial aid impacting school selection. The last group, which holds 22% of influence, is the community. Students in this group are influenced by friends, siblings, advisors, coaches, and other trusted individuals. Community-influenced usually pay a little less for college and are driven by location for their selection (Sallie Mae & Ipsos Public Affairs, 2017).



The second target market is the parents of high school students, specifically the early adulthood parents and mature adulthood parents. These parents were 24-40+ when the potential student was born, so now they are mostly likely 35-58.

Parents are greatly influenced by the cost of college when it comes to helping their student select a school to apply to or enroll at. In 2017, 69% of families eliminated a college choice due to cost. This is an all-time high; the last time it was reported at this proportion was 2012. The lowest recorded response was 56% in 2009. In the 2016-2017 academic year, scholarships were the most frequently used means of funding a student's education, with 49% of families utilizing them. Grants trail closely behind at 47% use. The third most-used resource is a parent's income, with 46% of families relying on it. Borrowing is another resource, with 14% using parent borrowing and 36% using student borrowing; these figures have increased from 12% and 29%, respectively, in 2016. Parents contribute a total of 31% to their student's college expense. Many families try to take measures to save on expenses; in 2017, 73% of families selected an in-state school rather than pay expensive out-of-state tuition. Half of students are also choosing to live at home to control affordability (Sallie Mae & Ipsos Public Affairs, 2017).

From the first day of preschool or earlier, 86% of families knew their student would attend college. Only 10% wait until high school to make that decision. Of the families who decided early-on that their student would attend college, 42% had a plan for how to pay for it. The implication from this is that these pre-planning parents have a price point in mind for the maximum amount they are willing to pay for a student's college. Depending on the availability of other resources to the family, it could restrict a student's ability to select their first-choice college (Sallie Mae & Ipsos Public Affairs, 2017).



The driving force behind perceived affordability of a university is income level and socioeconomic status (SES). SES is typically broken down into three tiers: lower, middle, and upper class. According to the Pew Research Center, "52% of American adults lived in middle-class households in 2016" (Kochhar, 2018). The median income of a middle-class household was \$78,442 in 2016, while the national middle-income range was \$45,200 to \$135,600. This includes households ranging from one person to five people (Kochhar, 2018). Targeting middle class parents is important because this group will be able to afford paying or contributing to their student's educational expenses. Even though the upper class will absolutely have the means to afford a college expense, money is typically not an influencing factor for this particular group; these families are more likely to spend the money to send their student to a prestigious school.

Parents in CSU's target market will support and value higher education. As stated earlier, Generation Z values their parent's advice and considers them a crucial influencer on their decision; 61% of students who plan to enroll in a bachelor program after high school had parents who responded that they expected their student to attain a bachelor's degree or better (Radford & Ifill, 2012). If a parent does not support their child's decision to pursue higher education or apply to a specific university, that child may not enroll after being accepted and choose to enroll at the university their parent approves of. Fortunately, 85% of parents strongly agree that college is an investment in their student's future (Sallie Mae & Ipsos Public Affairs, 2017). Therefore, they will take this decision seriously and spend time thoroughly evaluating options.

A parent's personal educational achievements also influence their students goals for college. Of students who reported they planned to enroll in a bachelor's degree program in the first year after high school, 67% had parents whose highest degree attained was a bachelor's degree or better (Radford & Ifill, 2012). Only 42% of students who planned to enroll in college



had parents who had a high school diploma or less, and 48% of students had parents with an associate's degree (Radford & Ifill, 2012).

Parents of high school students have their own methods of signaling interest in an institution. During their student's sophomore year of school, 33% of parents have signaled interest, and 49% of parents signal interest during their student's junior year. Both of these groups signal most commonly through a request for information on the website. By senior year, 90% of parents have signaled interest, the most popular way being registering their student for standardized tests. Aside from signaling interest, parents are very involved in their student's searching process; 80% of parents of sophomores, 89% of parents of juniors, and 98% parents of seniors acted to support enrollment. Parents will also act on behalf of the student; 90% of parents of seniors reported that they contacted an institution for their student, and 62% reported that they completed college applications for their student. When it comes to signaling interest though, parents are reactive, while students are proactive. Parents tend to be more concerned than students about practical factors in college selection, such as costs and safety (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & NRCCUA & OmniUpdate & CollegeWeekLive, 2017).

Diversity is an important factor to be aware of. All races, ethnicities, country of origin, genders, religions, and other demographic factors should be targeted in this marketing strategy. No student or parent should be excluded from CSU based on a physical demographic characteristic. CSU strives to be an inclusive and diverse institution.

The final element of this target market is location. The objectives of this marketing strategy states it will target current CSU markets, meaning the cities or counties that current enrolled students were residing when they applied.



Table V – Enrollment of First Year Traditional Freshmen by Residence, Fall Semester 2018

Georgia Counties - Enrollment Greater than 10	
Muscogee	Harris
Gwinnett	Coweta
Fayette	Troup
Cobb	Houston
Chattahoochee	Henry
Fulton	Douglas
Rockdale	
Alabama Counties - Enrollment Greater than 10	
Lee	
Georgia Counties - Enrollment Less than 10	
Marion	Carroll
Walton	Sumter
Thomas	Hall
Dekalb	Upson
Lee	Clayton
Meriwether	Lowndes
Cherokee	Camden
Taylor	Putnam
Newton	Laurens
Columbia	Colquitt
Bibb	Spalding
Paulding	Jackson



Heard	Gilmer
Floyd	Emanuel
Chatham	Bartow
Barrow	Wheeler
Ware	Telfair
Rabun	Monroe
Madison	Liberty
Jones	Dougherty
Bleckley	Appling
<b>Alabama Counties - Enrollment Less than 10</b>	
Russell	

(Columbus State University, Unpublished raw data, 2018)

### Position in the Market

Positioning determines consumer perception of a company within its market. The process helps to identify direct competitors, as well as expose unmet consumer demand in the market. Positioning is typically measured through a perceptual map, which uses four quadrants to determine placement of competitors. The factors used to measure the position in the industry are based on what the company is trying to measure.

CSU's competitive market would be other Georgia universities and colleges. Data for student perception of these universities is lacking, but retention rates reflect the overall student satisfaction with the institution. A retention rate measures how many students return to the same institution for a consecutive year of study. A higher rate shows that students are satisfied with the institution's services and feel that their needs are being met. Lower retention rates prove the



opposite (College Factual, 2017). The second measurement, cost, was selected because many students and their parents are influenced greatly by their ability to afford enrollment.

*Figure I - Perceptual Map of USG Institutions*



The perceptual map positions CSU (#10) as a mid-cost and mid-satisfactory institution.

It's also obvious that there seems to be a trend occurring in the industry. The higher the cost of the institution, the higher the retention rate. These higher performing institutions also have higher enrollment. It's apparent that a majority of institutions are in the low cost/low retention



quadrant. The high cost/low retention quadrant is completely empty, which is expected as no student will want to pay a high price for an experience they don't find satisfying. A gap in the industry would be a high retention/low cost school. If an institution could position itself into that quadrant, it would be the only direct competitor and could experience great success.

### Marketing Mix

The marketing mix consists of four main elements: product, place, price, and promotion.

All of these combine to create a strategic blend which will produce effective and efficient exchanges with the target market. The goal is to balance these elements to achieve optimal results. CSU already has an established product, place, and price, so this marketing plan will focus on establishing a promotion plan in reference to the current product, place, and price.

### Product

The core product that CSU offers is education. It is expected that CSU provides this, and that it does it well. If a company's core product is not equal to industry-standards, that company will be perceived as an inadequate provider. Therefore, CSU must provide students with an education that they feel is valuable and will provide them the benefits they are seeking. The following education-based strengths were identified in the SWOT analysis:

- Supportive environment for teaching and learning as evidenced by committed faculty dedicated to teaching
- Nationally accredited programs in business, education, music, theatre, art, nursing, and chemistry
- Robust Servant Leadership program



- International Education program opportunities
- Robust Honors program

(“CSU SWOT Table”, 2016)

CSU offers a variety of degrees to students including associate, bachelor, and graduate degrees. For the purpose of this marketing strategy, the focus will be on bachelor degrees as this is what the target market will be seeking. Below is a list of all four year undergraduate bachelor degrees available at CSU, sorted by college of study:

*Table VI - Baccalaureate Degree Programs (Undergraduate, Four-Year Degrees)*

College of Health Professions and Education	College of Business	College of the Arts	College of Letters and Sciences	
Early Childhood Education (BSEd)	Accounting (BBA)	Art (BA)	Biology (BA)	Exercise Science (BS)
Health and Physical Education (BSEd)	Finance (BBA)	Art History (BA)	Biology - Secondary Education Track (BA)	History (BA)
Health and Physical Education, Non Certification Track (BSEd)	General Business (BBA)	Art (BFA)	Biology (BS)	History - Secondary Education Track (BA)
Health Science (BS)	General Business - International Business Track (BBA)	Art Education (BSEd)	Chemistry - Biochemistry Track (BA)	Liberal Arts - Humanities and Social Science Track (BA)
Middle Grades Education - Multiple Subject Concentrations (BSEd)	Management (BBA)	Communication - Communication Studies Track (BA)	Chemistry - Secondary Education Track (BA)	Liberal Arts - Military and Global Issues Track (BA)
Nursing (BSN)	Management - Entrepreneurship Concentration (BBA)	Communication - Film Production Track (BA)	Chemistry (BS)	Liberal Arts - Philosophy Track (BA)



Nursing RN-to-BSN (BSN)	Management - Human Resource Concentration (BBA)	Communication - Integrated Media Track (BA)	Chemistry - ACS Certified Track (BS)	Mathematics (BA)
Special Education - General Curriculum - Reading Concentration (BSEd)	Management Information Systems (BBA)	Communication - Public Relations Track (BA)	Chemistry - Food Science Track (BS)	Mathematics (BS)
	Marketing (BBA)	Music (BA)	Chemistry - Forensic Track (BS)	Mathematics - Applied Mathematics Concentration (BS)
	Computer Science - Applied Computing Track (BS)	Music Education - Choral Concentration (BM)	Criminal Justice (BS)	Mathematics - Secondary Education Concentration (BS)
	Computer Science - CyberSecurity Track (BS)	Music Education - Instrumental Concentration (BM)	Earth and Space Science - Astrophysics and Planetary Geology Track (BS)	Modern Language and Culture - Spanish with Teacher Certification Track (BA)
	Computer Science - Education Track (BS)	Music Performance - Instrumental Concentration (BM)	Earth and Space Science - Astrophysics and Planetary Geology Track (BS)	Modern Language and Culture - Spanish Literature and Culture Track (BA)
	Computer Science - Games Programming Track (BS)	Music Performance - Piano/Organ Concentration (BM)	Earth and Space Science - Environmental Science Track (BS)	Political Science (BA)
	Computer Science - Software Systems Track (BS)	Music Performance - Vocal Concentration (BM)	Earth and Space Science - Geology Track (BS)	Psychology (BS)
	Information Technology (BS)	Theatre (BA)	English Language and Literature - Creative Writing Concentration (BA)	Sociology - General Sociology Concentration (BS)
	Information Technology (Web BSIT)	Theatre - Performance Track (BFA)	English Language and Literature - Literature Concentration (BA)	Sociology - Applied Sociology Concentration (BS)



		Theatre - Theatre Design & Technology Track (BFA)	English Language and Literature - Professional Writing Concentration (BA)	Sociology - Crime, Deviance, and Society Concentration (BS)
		Theatre Education (BSEd)	English Language and Literature - English and Secondary Education Concentration (BA)	

(Columbus State University, "Baccalaureate Degree Programs [Undergraduate, Four-Year Degrees]", 2018)

In addition to the core product, it's also important that a company provides value-added services. In today's competitive environment, a company cannot survive on their core product alone, because every company is providing that core product. Value-added services are areas where a company exceeds compared to competition. Every university provides students an education, but what differentiates CSU and makes students feel like they should enroll compared to other universities? The following value-added services were identified by the SWOT analysis as strengths:

- Competitive pricing compared to some larger USG institutions
- Positive reputation in the local area
- International Education grants
- Distinctive campus creates a unique and diverse quality of student life
- Increase in diversity within the student body (age, race, gender, ethnicity)
- Good "town-gown" relations and collaboration opportunities with local industry (in part due to CSU's unique outreach programs) i.e Partnerships with local schools
- Foundation assets
- Safe campuses, comparatively, with professional police presence
- Strong student support service (Career Center, ACE, Rec Center, Student Life, etc.)
- Nice new or updated facilities (RiverPark, Clearview, Arnold, Labs)



- Increase in online program offerings
- Faculty Center for Professional Development
- Faculty to student ratio

("CSU SWOT Table", 2016)

On-campus housing and meal plans are other value added services that are important to students. For incoming freshmen, there are two housing options: Clearview Hall and Broadway Crossing. All first year students are required to live on campus unless they meet exemption requirements.

Clearview Hall, located on Main Campus, is a fairly new dormitory featuring two shared bedrooms and two shared baths per suite. Each bedroom is equipped with two beds, two desks, two chairs, and two shelving storage areas. The bathroom has a walk in shower stall and toilet; the sinks are located in the common area. There are also two enclosed closets; one is located in the common area and the other is located directly in one of the bedrooms. The hall has a total of 130 suites with 16 Resident Assistant suites. There are 8 community areas for socialization, 8 study areas to accommodate both individuals and groups, 2 common area kitchens that allow students to cook, and 3 free laundry rooms. The building is protected by scan card access, and provides students with both wired and wireless internet access. A resident-only parking lot is located right outside the dorm, but residents are not allowed to park anywhere else on campus (Columbus State University, "Clearview Hall", 2018).

Broadway Crossings is located on RiverPark Campus. The suites here have two triple occupancy shared bedrooms, two shared baths, a large common area, and a shared full kitchen. Each shared bedroom is furnished with a bunk bed and loft bed, two desks, and two chairs. There is a walk-through closet with two sets of shelves, leading to the shared bath, which includes a



shower-tub combo, a toilet, and sink. The common area is furnished with a loveseat and individual seat, coffee table, and entertainment stand. The kitchen has a two-seat bar, sink, fridge, stove, and dishwasher. A small pantry is located near the entryway. This building also offers wired and wireless internet access, and it is protected via scan card access. There is a parking deck connected to the building for student parking. Broadway Crossing is located between Broadway and Front Avenue, so students are right in the middle of all the action happening in the Uptown Columbus district (Columbus State University, "Broadway Crossing & Columbus Hall", 2018).

The Cougar Cafe is an all-you-care-to-eat cafeteria with a variety of foods to accommodate any diet. The food is freshly prepared for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Food stations include Asian stir-fry, sandwiches, salads, soups, home cooked meals, fast food, cereal, waffle maker, pasta bar, and desserts. Options for vegetarians and vegans are also available. The Rankin Den operates similar to a restaurant with a cafeteria line, but it is still all-you-care-to-eat dining. There are not as many food options available each day compared to the Cougar Cafe, but the Rankin Den does accommodate all diets. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served, but on the weekends only brunch is served. The food stations at the Rankin Den are desserts, expo, grill, homezone, pizza, produce market, and soup (Aramark, 2018).

### **Place**

Columbus, Georgia has a variety of experiences to offer students attending Columbus State University. From art to history to food to outdoor adventures, there are always events happening off-campus in the community. Columbus has something to offer all interests.

The community has a huge heart for the arts including theatre, music, and visual art. There are two major theaters in Columbus: the Springer Opera House, which was named the



State Theater of Georgia, and the RiverCenter for the Performing Arts. The Springer utilizes local talent to produce a variety of shows, while the RiverCenter hosts theatrical productions and musical performances from across the world. The Columbus Museum has large collections of historical artifacts from the Chattahoochee River Valley and an enchanting American fine art collection including paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts. In addition to the permanent collections, the Museum also hosts exhibitions throughout the year, and provides many educational opportunities to community members through hosted events and programs. Columbus also has its own orchestra, the Columbus Symphony Orchestra, and its own ballet, The Columbus Ballet; both perform several times a year (Visit Columbus, n.d.).

Columbus, Georgia is rich with history dating back to pre-Civil War. Signage has been erected across the city to recognize influential people, historical landmarks, and moments of history. The National Civil War Naval Museum at Port Columbus and the National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center in Ft. Benning, GA both provide great journeys into history beyond within and beyond the local area (Visit Columbus, n.d.).

Columbus sits right on the Chattahoochee River, giving everyone access to exciting outdoor adventures. Zip line to Alabama and back; fish for bass, bream, catfish, and many other local species; kayak on turbulent or calm water; or bike through parks and trails. The most exciting adventure is the whitewater rafting course on the Chattahoochee. This man-made course can range from mild to wild, but delivers an unforgettable adventure. For people more interested in recreation and sports, Columbus has several golf courses, some of which are highly ranked. Flat Rock Park has a challenging disc golf course spread across the park with courses built for beginners to advanced players, and more courses are available in other parts of the city. There are also many organized runs, such as 5Ks or marathons (Visit Columbus, n.d.).



Columbus also has many other entertainment options. The Columbus Civic Center hosts events such as arena football, professional rodeos, concerts from up and coming artists, and much more. There are two bowling alleys; both offer laser tag and arcade games as well. There are three movie theaters in Columbus that all show current movies with a variety of special feature options. The Coca-Cola Space Science Center provides an immersive journey to experience and learn about space. Every Saturday, local farmers and crafters gather in Uptown Columbus for Market Days on Broadway. During the Spring and Fall, Uptown Columbus, Inc. hosts free concerts of local musicians and popular cover bands. There are several annual festivals such as RiverFest, Tri-City Latino Festival, Frogtown Crawfish Festival, Family Day Music Festival, Food Truck Festival, and more. Other events take place all year long with a variety of topics and entertainment (Visit Columbus, n.d.).

Aside from entertainment and fun opportunities, Columbus provides great employment opportunities. From Fortune 500 Companies to entrepreneurial ventures, there is a wide variety of employers looking to grow their teams with new graduates from CSU. Below is a table showing the number of employees at various Columbus, GA companies:

*Table VII - Major Employers in the Columbus, Georgia Region*

Rank	Company	Industry	Employees
1	Fort Benning	Variety, Military	40,000
2	TSYS	Payment Processing	4,690
3	Muscogee County School District	Education	4,300
4	Aflac	Insurance	3,670
5	Columbus Regional Healthcare System, Inc.	Healthcare	3,180



6	Columbus Consolidated Government	Political	3,130
7	Kia Motors Manufacturing Georgia Inc.	Automotive	3,000
8	St. Francis Hospital Inc.	Healthcare	3,000
9	BlueCross BlueShield of Georgia	Insurance	1,650
10	Columbus State University	Education	1,360
11	Pratt & Whitney	Aerospace Manufacturing	1,000
12	Synovus Financial Corp.	Financial	930
13	Johnson Controls Inc.	HVAC	925
14	Callaway Gardens	Entertainment Facility	900
15	Glovis	Supply Chain Management	900
16	MeadWestvaco Mahrt Operations	Packaging	900
17	NCR Corporation	Software	725
18	Hughston Clinic, P.C.	Healthcare	700
19	West Central Georgia Regional Hospital	Healthcare	665
20	Interface	Carpet Tile	630
21	Heatcraft North America (Kysor-Warren)	Refrigeration Systems	625
22	Columbus Bank and Trust Company	Financial	620
23	Snyder's-Lance Inc.	Food Production	600
24	Chassix (DMI Columbus, LLC)	Automotive Parts Manufacturing	550



25	AT&T GA	Technology, Cellular	500
26	Columbus Technical College	Education	390
27	Goodwill Industries of the Southern Rivers, Inc.	Business, Nonprofit	355
28	Hostess	Food Production	320
29	Kellogg's Snacks	Food Production	320
30	Batson-Cook Company	Construction Services	300
31	Swift Spinning, Inc.	Textile Manufacturing	300

(Columbus GA Chamber, n.d.)

In addition to the exciting things that Columbus, Georgia has to offer students, Columbus State University's campus is also an incredible component of the community and experience. With two distinctive and diverse campuses just 100 miles southwest of Atlanta, CSU provides a unique campus experience to students.

Main Campus is the heart of the university. The College of Business and the College of Letters and Sciences are located here. This campus is easy to access, but still feels secluded from the city. Most student services are located on this campus as well. The Student Recreation Center is a three-story facility providing various exercise equipment and activities to students looking to live a healthy lifestyle. The facility also has an Olympic swimming pool, lazy river, hot tub, and sauna. Across from the Recreation Center is the Lumpkin Center, where most indoor sporting events and large ceremonies take place. Nearby are the softball and baseball fields, and tennis courts. Towards the center of campus is the Davidson Student Center; located here is the bookstore, cafeteria, printing services, and student lounge. The Schuster Student Success Center, which houses the Academic Center of Excellence, Center for Career Development, Counseling Center, and the International Center for Education, is connected to the Davidson Student Center.



The Simon Schwob Memorial Library is a three-story building with a vast amount of resources for students and an extensive archive collection. There are two areas with computers, scanners, and printers that all students can use for school work. The library also has multiple study areas designed for individual and group studying throughout all three floors. The second and third floor house books and resources that students can check out, as well as study areas and private study rooms. There are several food options available on Main Campus other than the cafeteria. The Cougar Food Court has Chick-fil-A and Subway restaurants. There are two Provisions on Demand Express (P.O.D.) locations on Main Campus; one is in Stanley Hall and the other is in Schuster Student Success Center. Both serve drinks, snacks, and lunch items. Einstein Bros Bagels is located on the first floor of the library and serves bagels and coffee. Near the center of campus lives the iconic Thomas Y. Whitley Clock Tower, featured in CSU's logo and branding. The Student Health Center is located the Northwest corner of campus; students are provided full medical services at little to no cost here. At the south end of campus is student housing. Parking lots are scattered throughout the campus for commuting students, and a four-story parking garage is available on the Northeast corner of campus. Overall, it only takes about 15 minutes to walk from one side of campus to the other, so it's a physically small campus with a large-campus atmosphere (Columbus State University, "Maps", 2018).

RiverPark Campus is located in uptown Columbus, and it's home to the College of the Arts and the College of Health Care and Education. It gets its name because it is located near the Chattahoochee river. With buildings scattered throughout the uptown area, students are directly apart of the daily urban environment. The Corn Center for the Visual Arts not only houses all visual art classes, but has two galleries, which host exhibitions such as visiting artists' work, faculty work, and student work. The Rankin building on Broadway has a small bookstore,



garden, and cafeteria. Aside from the cafeteria, RiverPark campus also has a P.O.D. Micro Market, which stocks a small supply of groceries. There is a self-serve P.O.D. Market in the Frank Brown Hall building on Broadway as well. The Riverside Theatre is the stage for all student productions and is open to the public for student-led performances. The Saunders Center for Music Studies has a music library inside. Student housing is available at many different locations across the campus. There is a second Student Health Services office located at RiverPark Campus as well. Although the services on RiverPark Campus are more limited compared to Main Campus, the community provides many off-campus opportunities for entertainment and other interests. There is a free shuttle service to transport students between each campus and the shuttle makes stops at multiple locations on RiverPark Campus. There is a parking garage available for commuters, as well as public parking around the area.

### **Price**

Students are charged on a per-semester basis. Tuition is a variable cost, with the total based on the number of credit hours taken, while institutional fees are a fixed cost. Below are several expense tables to highlight the cost of a semester at CSU:

*Table VIII – Tuition for Academic Year 2018-2019*

<b>Tuition</b>	<b>Per-Credit Hour Cost</b>
In-State	\$177.67
Out-of-State	\$627.07
Nonresident Aliens	\$627.07

(Columbus State University, "Fiscal Year 2019 [Fall 2018, Spring 2019, Summer 2019]

Tuition and Fees", 2018)



Table IX – Required Fees for Academic Year 2018-2019

Required Fees	Cost per Semester
Activity Fee	\$67.00
Athletic Fee	\$200.00
Health Fee	\$53.00
Access Fee	\$30.00
Technology Fee	\$79.00
Parking Deck Fee	\$47.00
Rec Center Fee	\$180.00
International Fee	\$14.00
Institutional Fee	
1-4 Hours	\$132.50
<i>Total Fees</i>	<i>\$802.50</i>
5+ Hours	\$265.00
<i>Total Fees</i>	<i>\$935.00</i>

(Columbus State University, "Fiscal Year 2019 (Fall 2018, Spring 2019, Summer 2019)

Tuition and Fees", 2018)

Table X – Housing Cost for Academic Year 2018-2019

First Year Housing	Cost per Semester
Clearview Hall	\$2,895
Broadway Crossing	\$2,750

(Columbus State University, "Student Housing Areas", 2017)

A first-year freshman taking 12 credit hours and living in a main campus dorm would pay CSU a total of \$8,520, but a similar student who lives in a RiverPark dorm would pay CSU a total of \$8,375. In addition to the expense paid to CSU, students also have other expenses such as books and supplies, transportation, or other costs of living. It's estimated that these would approximately total \$4,730 for a campus resident annually, which means that the total expense of being a student would be \$10,885 or \$10,760 per semester for Main Campus and RiverPark.



Table XI – Meal Plans for Academic Year 2018-2019

First Year Meal Plan	Includes	Cost per Semester
<i>Resident Students</i>		
All Access	Unlimited meals, \$250 Cougar Cash	\$2,025
<i>Commuting Students</i>		
Cougar 50	50 meals, \$100 Cougar Cash	\$468
Cougar 35	35 meals, \$50 Cougar Cash	\$310
Cougar 25	25 meals	\$189
Cougar 110	110 meals, \$550 Cougar Cash	\$1,359
Cougar 170	170 meals, \$550 Cougar Cash	\$1,720
Cougar Cash	\$25 minimum, \$1 for \$1	\$1

(Columbus State University Dining Services, n.d.)

Table XII – Estimated Annual Expenses

Expense	Residents	Commuters (living at home)	Commuters (not living at home)
Books and supplies	\$1,350.00	\$1,350.00	\$1,350.00
Room only	-	-	\$5,100.00
Board only	-	\$2,600.00	\$4,100.00
Transportation	\$1,250.00	\$1,800.00	\$1,800.00
Other expenses	\$2,130.00	\$2,300.00	\$2,300.00
<i>Total</i>	\$4,730.00	\$8,050.00	\$14,650.00

("Annual Expenses", 2017)

A first-year freshman taking 15 credit hours and living in a main campus dorm would pay CSU a total of \$8,520, but a similar student who lives in a RiverPark dorm would pay CSU a total of \$8,375. In addition to the expense paid to CSU, students also have other expenses such as books and supplies, transportation, or other costs of living. It's estimated that these would approximately total \$4,730 for a campus resident annually, which means that the total expense of being a student would be \$10,885 or \$10,740 per semester for Main Campus and RiverPark



Campus students, respectively. A third student taking 15 credit hours who commutes to campus from home would pay CSU a minimum total of \$3,600 per semester, excluding the optional commuter meal plans. Including estimated expenses, the total expense per semester for a commuting student would be \$7,625. If the commuting student chose to purchase a meal plan, the maximum cost would be \$9,650 (with the All Access meal plan) and minimum \$7,814 (with the Cougar 25 meal plan) per semester. Commuters not living at home, students who are either Out-of-State or a Nonresident Alien, or an upperclassman student were excluded from this price analysis because they are not within the target market of this strategy.

Compared to other competitors in the University System of Georgia, CSU is competitively priced. Below is a table of other competing universities' tuition and fees.

Institutions highlighted in red are less costly than CSU, while those in green are more costly.

*Table XIII - Cost Comparison of CSU vs. Other USG Competitors*

Institution	Enrollment	Tuition per Credit Hour In State	Fees per Semester (15 hours)	Total for 15 credit hours
<b><i>Institutions of Equal Enrollment</i></b>				
Albany State University	6,262	\$165.20	\$753.00	\$3,231.00
Augusta University	5,291	\$3,362 (10+ hours)	\$960.00	\$4,322.00
Clayton State University	6,555	\$165.20	\$457.00	\$2,935.00
Georgia College & State University	5,987	\$3,662 (7+ hours)	\$916.00	\$4,578.00
Middle Georgia State University	7,221	\$110.87	\$641.00	\$2,304.05
Savannah State University	4,239	\$165.20	\$889.00	\$3,367.00
Valdosta State University	8,778	\$177.67	\$1,065.00	\$3,730.05
<b><i>Larger USG Institutions</i></b>				
Georgia State University	25,790	\$291.00	\$1,064.00	\$5,429.00
Kennesaw State University	32,945	\$180.87	\$1,003.00	\$3,716.05
University of Georgia	28,848	\$4,776 (6+ hours)	\$1,139.00	\$5,915.00
Columbus State University	6,798	\$177.67	\$935.00	\$8,520.05



The table shows that CSU is equally competitive with other institutions of similar enrollment, but compared to the three USG institutions with the largest enrollment, CSU is more cost-effective. Perspective on the cost of education as a reflection of quality is changing, though; only 54% of families believed that a more expensive school provides a superior education. That figure was 60% in 2008 (Sallie Mae & Ipsos Public Affairs, 2017).

### **Promotion**

Students and parents today receive information through a variety of promotional channels. To have effective communication with the target market, it's best to integrate all marketing communication channels to carry the same message to students and parents.

*Table XIV – Most Influential Information Resources for College Decisions*

#	Seniors	#	Juniors
1	Calculator results	1	Website for school
2	Website for school	2	Calculator results
3	Email from school	3	Email from school
4	Videos	4	Printed brochures/phone calls (tie)
5	Printed brochures	5	College planning website entries

(Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018)

Parents had similar results, rating websites, financial aid calculator results, and print materials as most influential, in order of influence (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & NRCCUA & OmniUpdate & CollegeWeekLive, 2017).

These results provide important insights into the best ways to communicate with students. As seen in the table above, the two most influential information resources for both seniors and juniors is the financial aid calculator results and the official school website. Juniors are the only



group of students heavily influenced by college planning websites. Video is increasing in popularity and influence, especially for seniors. This is a trend that is expected to continue in upcoming years, but students still value and are influenced by traditional information channels such as print, phone calls, and email. These responses show that it's best to invest in multiple channels with a varied mix of engagement to reach the widest possible number of students (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018).

### Cost Calculator

High school seniors rated the cost calculator as the most influential resource, with an average 4.05 out of a 5 point scale. It's vital that this resource provides exactly what the student is looking for. Scholarship information is the driving force behind this influence as "three out of four students cite scholarship information as critical" (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018). Despite the strong influence, students are still looking for quick and easy answers; they will quit using a school's calculator if it is requesting too much information or taking too long to fill out. Therefore, it's important that a school's calculator request the minimum amount of information needed to provide the details a student is looking for. Students are also looking for personalized results. This includes things such as scholarship eligibility, financial aid eligibility, and costs associated with their living arrangements. The more personalized information a school can provide about the expected expenses, the more influence it will have on a student's decision (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018).

Columbus State University provides a Net Price Calculator to students through the Financial Aid webpage of the website. It requests the following information:



- Plans to apply for financial aid
  - If this option is answered “Yes”, the following information is also requested:
    - Marital status
    - Children
    - Number in family
    - Number in college
    - Household income
- Age
- Living arrangement
- Residency

Based on the information provided, the calculator provides the estimated expenses. The estimates currently provided are based on the 2016-2017 academic year. The calculator provides estimates for most academic related expenses.


(Columbia State University, “Net Price Calculator”, 2018)

The calculator does not request information related to merit based grant and scholarship aid, therefore it does not provide a student’s eligibility for institutional scholarships. CSU should add an optional portion to the calculator for students to enter merit information so that the calculator could provide a list of merit-based grants and scholarships that students could be eligible for. By providing this information, CSU will be showing students how they can further reduce the estimated net price through their eligibility.

The cost calculator also has potential to be a successful lead capture tool. Students who interact with the cost calculator are signaling their interest in CSU. The calculator currently does not collect any form of contact information, so there is no record of who has signaled interest through the cost calculator. CSU should modify the cost calculator to at least request basic



Figure II – Columbus State University's Current Cost Calculator



<b>Academic Year: 2016-17</b>	
Estimated tuition and fees	\$20,680
<b>+ Estimated room and board charges</b>	<b>\$10,760</b>
<small>(Includes rooming accommodations and meals)</small>	
<b>+ Estimated cost of books and supplies</b>	<b>\$1,350</b>
<b>+ Estimated other expenses</b>	<b>\$3,500</b>
<small>(Personal expenses, transportation, etc.)</small>	
<b>Estimated total cost of attendance:</b>	<b>\$36,290</b>
<b>- Estimated total grant aid:</b>	<b>\$5,600</b>
<small>(Includes both merit and need based grant and scholarship aid from Federal, State, or Local Governments, or the Institution)</small>	
<b>Estimated Net Price After Grants and Scholarships:</b>	<b>\$30,690</b>
<small>Grants and scholarships do not have to be repaid. Some students also qualify for student loans to assist in paying this net price; however, student loans do have to be repaid.</small>	

(Columbus State University, "Net Price Calculator", 2018)

The calculator does not request information related to merit based grant and scholarship aid, therefore it does not provide a student's eligibility for institutional scholarships. CSU should add an optional portion to the calculator for students to enter merit information so that the calculator could provide a list of merit-based grants and scholarships that students could be eligible for. By providing this information, CSU will be showing students how they can further reduce the estimated net price through their eligibility.

The cost calculator also has potential to be a successful lead capture tool. Students who interact with the cost calculator are signaling their interest in CSU. The calculator currently does not collect any form of contact information, so there is no record of who has signaled interest through the cost calculator. CSU should modify the cost calculator to at least request basic



contact information such as a first and last name and email address or phone number. This would allow CSU to build a list of interested students who are concerned about how much college will cost them. CSU recruiters can reach out to these students with more information about financial aid, tuition and fees, and scholarships and grants. Following up with students also provides the opportunity for recruiters to create a detailed estimate to include more factors such as potential major, academic ability, minority opportunities, and other information that could potentially expand a student's aid eligibility. Utilizing this resource as a lead capture tool will help expand the relationship with the interested student and have a great positive influence on their decision.

### School Website

A school's website is a vital tool to students searching for information about a college, and the content on the website has a significant impact on a student's decision. Seniors rated websites at 4.02 points out of a 5 point scale for influence, and juniors rated the website at 4.16 (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018). Students report that they are looking for cost/tuition information, scholarship opportunities, academic programs/degrees, financial aid, how to apply, student life, dorm accommodations, overview of campus life, unique academic programs, and the school environment when search a school's website. Although both juniors and seniors are interested in all of these topics, juniors have more interest in information about campus life, academic programs, and student life (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018).

It's also important that the website has strong search engine optimization (SEO). Web search is the most popular way for students to find a school's website, with 9 out of 10 students reporting they use that method. They use search terms such as the name of the school, major or academic program, and location to find the information they are seeking. Strong SEO is vital so



that when students search for these terms, the correct school's website is populating in the top results (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018).

The other key component of a website is user experience. Navigating should be a smooth and easy process for students. If a student becomes frustrated, they are more likely to leave the website. After leaving a site, 28% of seniors and 36% of juniors will look for college information on another site, and 10% of seniors and 16% of juniors will remove the school from consideration (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018). There is a fine balance between a good and bad experience on a website; students can become frustrated by things such as not having enough information or having too much content on a website. They also find it frustrating when the link options are confusing, the site is not mobile friendly, there are too few photos or the photos are not unique, people or places aren't communicated, the site is over-designed, the forms don't work, or the videos are too long or boring. Poor user experience will damage a student's interest and the school's credibility (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018).



Figure III – Columbus State University's Current Website Homepage



(www.columbusstate.edu)

CSU's website is challenging to navigate. Students have to search each drop down menu to see all the content available to them. There are layers of web pages behind each drop down menu, and sub-menus on the webpages. The homepage contains content written for current students, alumni, donors, faculty and staff, and potential students. The rotating banner images feature information about events happening on campus, and only one banner has a call to action directed towards potential students or parents for campus tours, which is seen in the image above. There are multiple sets of main menus, and the request for information (RFI) form is linked through a "Find Out More" button that is hidden below the fold of the site. There is no clear starting point for a student who just wants to learn more about the university, and the number of links, directions, and categories can be overwhelming for a student just beginning to explore what CSU has to offer them. Overall, the website has overwhelming potential to be a frustrating experience for students and their parents.



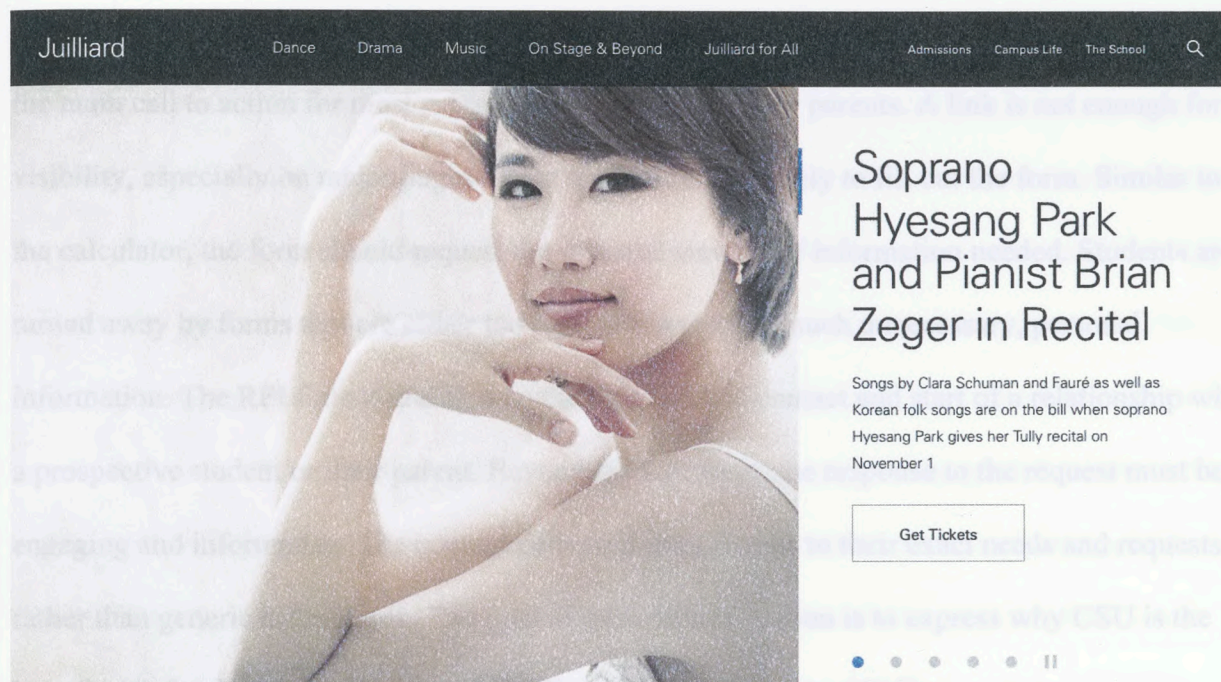
The major pain point of the website is the amount and variety of information available.

Prospective students do not need access to information intended for current students, faculty and staff, alumni, military, potential employees, or donors. They may become frustrated if they aren't able to find information pertaining to them, or they may become confused by information intended for a different audience. The website should be solely intended for prospective students and their parents, which will increase their user experience and satisfaction with the site. Any information intended for a different audience should be moved to a different location. All components of the website should also be mobile-compatible. Studies show that "41-47% of seniors and juniors, respectively, do nearly all web browsing on a mobile device" (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018). This includes any forms, calculators, and content.

A less important pain point, but still impactful to an audience, is the design of the website. A modern look and advanced technological features will be impressive to a prospective student or their parent and communicate to them that CSU is a relevant school worth their time and consideration. The design should enhance the user experience and further provide a great experience for the target market.



Figure IV – Julliard's Award-Winning Website Homepage



(<https://www.juilliard.edu>)

The Julliard School won the Webby Award for the School/University category in 2018 (The Webby Awards, 2018). It features interactive components, easy navigation, and obvious starting points for students interested in certain aspects of the school. There is a clear call to action on all sections of the homepage, which navigates prospective students to the exact information they are seeking. The website is entirely dedicated to prospective students and their parents; there is no content included that speaks to other target markets. The design is also reflective of the culture of the campus. It is important for CSU to do a full analysis of current school/university web design to ensure they are meeting the expectations of students based on industry trends.



## RFI Form

The other impactful pain point is the hidden request for information (RFI) form. This is the main call to action for most prospective students and their parents. A link is not enough for visibility, especially on major pages where users are more likely to fill out the form. Similar to the calculator, the form should request the minimal amount of information needed. Students are turned away by forms that are either too long or request too much unnecessary, personal information. The RFI form could also be the first point of contact and start of a relationship with a prospective student or their parent. Beyond the RFI form, the response to the request must be engaging and informative. The content delivered should cater to their exact needs and requests, rather than generic information. The goal of this communication is to express why CSU is the best choice for the student (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018).

*Figure V – Columbus State University's Current Request for Information Form*

### Office of Undergraduate Admissions Inquiry Form

Are you an International Student \* ☐ Yes  
☐ No

#### Personal Information

First Name \*

Middle Initial

Last Name \*

City \*

Country \*

Birthdate \*

Email \*

Check here if you would like to receive text messages. ☒ Yes

#### Educational Background

What school do you currently attend? \*

Choose Unknown School if no match

High School Graduation Year \*

Anticipated Start Term \*

Anticipated Start Year \*

Current GPA

SAT Critical Reasoning  SAT Math

ACT English  ACT Math

Which statement best describes you? \*

Intended Major \*

Pre-Professional Programs

#### Optional Information

Gender

How did you first find out about us?

Are you interested in the CSU Honors College? ☐ Interested  
☐ Not Interested

(Columbus State University, "Request More Information", 2017)



### Email

Even though it appears to be an outdated communication channel, email is still an impactful resource; both seniors and juniors rated it as the third most influential information resource. These students report that they will open an email from an institution because they are curious to learn more about the school, interested in enrolling at the school, the email had a great subject line, the student has opened messages from the school before and found it useful, the student's name appeared in the subject line, or they are influenced by their parents to open the email (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018). Emails are reportedly opened at least once a week by 96%-99% of parents and students, and it's most often used on smartphones, which means the content should be designed to fit their screen (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & NRCCUA & OmniUpdate & CollegeWeekLive, 2017). The key to successful emails is engaging content. Each message sent through an email should feel personal, as if a recruiter had written the email to the student, rather than a mass-distributed template. Sharing personal stories from faculty or students is another method to add humanistic details to the message. The email is not the final touch-point the university has with the student; the ultimate goal is that the email will start the student on a journey that ends with enrollment. The more personalized this journey is to a student, the more likely it is to see success. Sending out generic emails that discuss the campus as a whole will not be as engaging for prospective students. The content shared through the emails should also be relevant to the student's interests; for example, a chemistry student should receive information about the sciences available at the university while an art student should receive information about the arts. The website will also have a role in email, since almost half of students visit the college website through links provided in an email. Whether the email has a designated landing page or directs to a main web page, the content promised in the email should



be delivered on the website immediately. Most importantly, the design and user experience of the email should also be mobile-friendly as a large percentage of students check email through their mobile device daily (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018).

### Video

Currently booming in popularity, there are some important things to consider when using video to share information. Students responded that they are more interested in watching videos about “current students’ experiences; campus sights, sounds, and [environment]; campus activities; residence halls; tours of classrooms; alumni on the value of their degrees; and faculty on their classes” (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018). It’s important to keep in mind that these students are also watching influencers on YouTube vlogs, and they expect that same quality and entertainment from most videos. Although there is some interest, tutorial videos, such as financial aid or how to apply, were rated the lowest. The length of the video can also impact whether students will watch it; a large percentage of students reported that a video over 2 minutes was too long and they wouldn’t watch it to the end. Students usually expect a video on web pages related to “campus/student life, academics, admissions, about the university, residence halls, financial aid”, and small percentages expect videos on “athletic web pages, social media, and alumni web pages” (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018).

### Texting

Texting is a channel that is not often used by schools, but students are open to receiving communications this way. Nearly 80% of students said they are “open to receiving text messages” (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018), but only 41% of seniors and 66% of juniors are receiving them (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018). Parents are also interested in texting, with 56%-69% reporting so, but 82-89% have not received a text (Ruffalo



Noel Levitz & NRCCUA & OmniUpdate & CollegeWeekLive, 2017). Incorporating this channel can help strengthen the relationship the student and their parent has with the school if utilized efficiently. Students reported that they find the following text messages interesting: “acceptance notification, deadline reminders, details about applications, rejection notification, general information about academic programs or majors, check-ins from admissions representative, links to social media posts, and photos or videos showing campus life” (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018). Because texting is perceived as an efficient form of communication, messages should be limited to short thoughts, not long paragraphs with detailed information. The main purpose of utilizing texting is to continuously remind students about the school and direct them to other channels that will persuade them to enroll.

### Social Media

Although social media did not have as large of an impact on influence as an information resource, students do utilize it as a way to discover more about the culture, lifestyle, and environment of the campus. They want a peek into what it would be like if they were a student at the school. Of the social media platforms that students visit daily, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook were identified as the most popular platforms for information on colleges. Even though Snapchat is one of the most used platform on a daily basis, there are very few students who utilize it as an information resource. Facebook, while still popular, is seeing a dramatic decrease in use of students, but it’s an important channel for parents of the students, therefore it is still a relevant platform (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018). Topics such as “what social life is like on campus, what it’s like to live in the dorms, what it will be like to be in classes, what qualifications I need to have to be accepted, what internships might be a part of my academic program, how I’ll pay for college, and what I need to do to apply” (Ruffalo Noel



Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018) were identified by students as information they would look for on social media. Parents on the other hand are more interested in information for specific programs, and are more likely to interact with posts with photos and links to news or feature stories (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & NRCCUA & OmniUpdate & CollegeWeekLive, 2017). Both organic and paid posts will be vital to CSU's success with social media communication. Students refer to a school's social media profile or page to the way they refer to the website, so the information available through the profiles is equally as important as a school's paid advertising. Organic information can be seen by anybody, so a majority of the content should be broad-based, with occasional targeted posts sprinkled throughout. Paid posts allow CSU to target specific groups of people, therefore the content should be customized to speak to the intended audience. An occasional generic-content paid post will be necessary to increase brand awareness across the whole target market.

The promotional efforts mentioned so far have been focused on increasing the enrollment of first-year traditional freshmen through a better marketing experience while these students are searching for information. While these strategies will also increase brand awareness, the following promotional efforts are intended solely for brand awareness and are less likely to contribute to increased enrollment.

### Banner Ads

Banners ads may not be as effective at conversion as other marketing activities, but they are extremely effective in awareness; "67% of seniors and 68% of juniors saw paid ads for colleges and universities" (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018). By reporting that they saw an ad, students are showing that they not only saw the ad, but they recall seeing it, meaning that the ad achieved brand awareness. In terms of conversion, "41% of seniors and 45% of



juniors clicked on paid ads” (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018); parents had similar results with “33% of parents of seniors and 36% of parents of juniors clicking on paid links” (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & NRCCUA & OmniUpdate & CollegeWeekLive, 2017). The messaging, content, and landing page of the ad should not be ignored as they will aid in the click-thru-rate, but the brand awareness should be CSU’s main focus when purchasing digital advertising. Students reported that they most often saw and clicked on ads through Google search, with display ads on a web page being clicked the least. Even if a student does not click on the ad when they see it, “30% of seniors and 44% of juniors would visit the main website for a school they saw in an ad” (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & OmniUpdate, 2018). Therefore, brand recognition is key in digital advertising, so those unconverted users will later come back to look for more information even if the ad does not see a direct conversion. Another component of digital advertising is remarketing, which is showing ads to people who have previously visited the website or used a mobile app. Remarketing efforts are vital for building brand awareness, as it exposes the student to the brand again and reminds them about the school. This strategy can also be extremely focused; for instance, a student who viewed the college application but did not complete or submit it can be targeted with an ad reminding them about the admissions deadline. Through Google Ads, students and their parents can be shown ads for CSU after they leave the website and continue to search for other schools. Google also allows video remarketing through YouTube videos and channels (Google, n.d.).

### Billboards

Another extremely effective media option for brand awareness is billboards. With the perfect location and an eye-catching design and message, these advertisements can be seen by the target market multiple times a month, building awareness and recognition each view.



According to MediaLease OOH, an agency that leases out-of-home marketing solutions, “over 80% of billboard viewers look at the advertising message” (MediaLease OOH, 2018). When evaluating a billboard, it’s best to consider the commuting routes of the target audience rather than the impressions, which are usually highest in the most popular areas of town. For example, a billboard purchased on a route that a student would take to school would be more effective than a billboard near the popular mall a student may visit once on the weekend. The same strategy applies to parents and their work commutes or in areas where parents would be with their child, such as sporting events or after school activities. A billboard along a daily or weekly commute for the target audience will have more impressions with the target audience, therefore brand awareness will increase over the time the billboard is up. Another strategy to increase brand awareness is to have billboards around the area with a similar or matching design and message; awareness will grow through recognition of the billboard a driver has already seen or is similar to one somewhere else.

### Implementation

To carry out the strategies outlined in this marketing plan, multiple departments and teams will be involved. The goal is for this marketing plan to take effect in August 2019, which will influence the decisions of the first year traditional freshmen enrollment in 2020 and beyond. The tasks below will achieve implementation of the strategy, and the projected timeline will meet the goal completion day.

First of all, a team of recruiters and marketing staff will determine the journey map for enrollment of prospective students and their parents. The journey map will outline each step that a prospective student and their parent will take that ultimately leads the student to enrolling at CSU. Each information resource will have a determined end goal that guides the prospective



student to the next step on their enrollment journey. Overall, this enrollment journey map will influence all marketing efforts to achieve the enrollment objective set forth in this marketing strategy.

The largest effort will be the restructure and redesign of the website. A team consisting of communications, marketing, creative, and information technology staff will work together to cover all aspects of this project. The first task for the team will be to evaluate other college websites to determine current trends and experience what prospective students are viewing during their college search. There should be a mix of schools that CSU directly competes with as well as schools that have been recognized for their excellent website. The team will then need to determine what content needs to be included on CSU's website and begin constructing a journey map specifically for the website. This journey map will detail how a prospective student will be guided through the various web pages, leading to the final action of a student signaling interest through either the RFI form, the cost calculator, a campus tour, or an application. The team will also need to determine a solution for migrating the content that is irrelevant to prospective students, but necessary for others involved with CSU, such as faculty and staff, current students, alumni, and donors. Once the content and journey map have been finalized, a wire frame will be built and the communications staff will begin working on writing the content. The communications staff will have total control over the content and will be responsible for writing all content to ensure cohesiveness, but the team will need to consult with other departments to ensure the accuracy of the information. The creative and information technology staff will take the wireframe and begin to build the website; mobile compatibility will be a top priority. The information technology staff should also be aware of the qualities that go into search engine optimization (SEO) and build that into the website. When the website design is finalized and the



content is inserted, the website will go through at least three rounds of user experience testing with groups of both high school students and parents of high school students. These tests will ensure that the website is easy to navigate, the target market will have a positive experience using the website, and that all necessary information is included. The final task is to publish the website. This team will also be responsible for continued upkeep of the website after the completion of this implementation phase, but the number of staff needed for the initial redesign may not be needed for the upkeep.

Beyond the design of the website, this team will also be responsible for the request for information (RFI) form and the cost calculator, which both live on the site. Both resources need to be evaluated to determine the essential information needed to provide the best results. The team will need to work with Financial Aid when evaluating the cost calculator, and they need to explore the option of adding merit information to the cost calculator to show students scholarship eligibility. The option of requesting contact information also needs to be planned and implemented to turn the cost calculator into a lead generation tool. Once the request fields have been determined, the information technology staff will make the updates to both existing forms.

At this point, the cost calculator is complete, but the RFI form requires further work from the team. The communications and marketing staff will create a strategy for the responses to a RFI form submission and create a journey map for prospective students and their parents. The end goal of this resource is for a student to take the next step in their enrollment journey. With the strategy created, the communications staff will write the content and work with the creative staff to design any components needed for the responses. Depending on the expertise of the creative team, the information technology staff may have to provide help with this task. After the responses have been written and designed, they will be loaded into the necessary softwares so



that when a RFI is submitted, the responses will be triggered. As with the website, this team will remain responsible for the upkeep of these resources, adjusting them as needed to achieve the best experience and results.

The email marketing strategy team will have a similar task list to the RFI. Marketing staff is responsible for creating journey maps based on various stages a prospective student and their parent may be in. Emails will be developed to complete each journey map, which will require content writing, designing, and uploading to software. The same staff coordinating these tasks for the RFI submission responses will be responsible for the email tasks. This team can also develop the text communication strategy will working on emails as it will be similar in terms of journey maps and content, just in a shorter context.

Social media requires a dedicated staff member with expertise in this resource. This staff member will be responsible for creating the social media strategy for all platforms that CSU currently uses, developing campaigns for each platform, coordinating paid social media advertising, examining the analytics, and evaluating other potential useful platforms. To implement the social media strategy, this role will also write all social media content and work with creative staff to develop any needed graphics. These tasks will be continuous, which is why this staff member's duties should be solely focused on this resource.

All other promotional efforts require a similar set of tasks. For video, marketing staff will develop a list of needed content, and communications staff will write the content for the video. Creative staff will coordinate the production and post-production activities of the video. Video will be used in other strategies, therefore it doesn't require its own strategy or journey map. For digital banner ads and billboards, marketing staff will provide the strategic goal of the campaign, and the communications staff will write the messaging for the ads. Creative staff will create the



needed graphics. Unique to these two promotional efforts is the need for a media buyer; this role will be responsible for evaluating media locations and providing recommendations of the best media to invest in based on the goals of the advertisement and overall strategy. Because banner ads and billboards are focused on brand awareness rather than conversion, they also don't require a journey map, but staff working on these efforts should create a plan of how these advertisements can lead students to the enrollment journey through other available resources.

This projected timeline is padded with time between projected completion date of all strategies and the goal effective date as it is expected that these timelines will be extended and changed as problems arise during implementation.

*Projected timeline:*

- Enrollment Journey Mapping - December 21
- Website
  - Evaluate other college websites - December 21
  - Determine content and construct journey map - January 25
  - Solution for migrating other content - January 25
  - Wire frame & writing content - February 15
  - Build website - April 19
  - User experience testing - May 10
  - Publish website - May 24
  - Continue upkeep - Ongoing
- RFI Form
  - Determine essential information - February 8
  - Update form with request fields - February 21
  - Response strategy & journey map - March 8
  - Write content - April 5
  - Design needed components - May 10
  - Load into software - May 17



- Cost Calculator
  - Determine essential information - February 8
  - Update form with request fields - February 21
- Email & Texting
  - Journey maps - May 3
  - Content writing - June 7
  - Design - July 12
  - Upload - July 19
- Social media
  - Hiring/selection of staff member - January 31
  - Social media strategy - March 29
  - Campaign development - April 26
  - Write social media content - *ongoing*
  - Develop needed graphics - *ongoing*
- Video
  - Develop needed content - March 22
  - Write content - April 12
  - Production - May 31
  - Post-production - July 12
- Digital banner ads & Billboards
  - Strategic goal of campaign - March 29
  - Write messaging - April 19
  - Create needed graphics - May 24
  - Media buyer selects placement - June 21

### Evaluation

Throughout the period when this marketing plan is active, it's important to evaluate its effectiveness to discover where improvements could be made. The metrics below will reflect on the success of the individual strategies as well as the overall achievement of the objectives.



### **Brand Awareness**

To measure brand awareness, aided and unaided recall should be measured. Unaided awareness, which is when a participant is able to recall a brand name or other feature being measured without any prompting, measures the strongest form of brand awareness. Aided awareness provides a prompt to help a participant remember the brand. Beyond basic brand awareness, these metrics can also measure awareness and recall of advertising messages, attitude towards a brand, perception of a brand, and other important brand components.

Aside from recall, there are a few other metrics that can indicate an increase in brand awareness. The volume of people searching for "Columbus State University" or other branded variations can indicate brand awareness. It is expected that there will be an increase in this volume due to influence from this marketing plan. The number of people directly typing in the URL can also indicate awareness and recall; they may be referencing a brochure or billboard they saw, which shows that they are aware of CSU.

Brand awareness can also be measured through the results of advertisements. For banner ads, impressions indicate the number of potential viewers of the ad, while reach measures the number of unique potential viewers. The click-thru-rate (CTR) also indicates brand awareness as viewers were aware of the ad and were influenced to click on it. Social media produces similar metrics. Although helpful, these metrics are not fully indicative of brand awareness as they do not accurately represent actual views, only potential views.

### **Increase in Enrollment**

The most obvious sign of success would be an increase in enrollment of first year traditional students in fall semester 2020. With the projected start date being August 2019, the class of 2020 will be the first class exposed to the plan's influence, so an increase is expected



beginning fall semester 2020. The number of applications received will also indicate potential success towards this objective as a higher number of applications leads to a larger pool of students who could potentially enroll at CSU. A positive one year change in total enrollment by place of residence will expose which areas of the geographic target market are responding to the strategies. With higher enrollment, an increase in the graduating class of 2023 should also be expected; a low increase or decrease will indicate that students are not satisfied with CSU and are either enrolling elsewhere or quitting their degree. This issue is outside the scope of this strategy, but the data should still be tracked as it may be an issue to solve in the next marketing plan.

A majority of the website traffic should be following the outlined journey map; this would indicate that the website is successful in delivering information and guiding visitors through journey. An unclear traffic pattern indicates that the website is not correctly funneling students and their parents through the content, therefore it may or may not lead the student to signal their interest. An increase in RFI form submissions is expected as the website will be directing students towards this lead capturing tool. The cost calculator should have contact information submissions that are similar to the specific web page traffic; submissions that are substantially less than the web page visits indicates that students are not completing the form, likely because it is too long or they become frustrated..

Emails, social media, text communications, and banner ads should meet or exceed the standard click-through-rate (CTR). A lower-than-average CTR would indicate that the messaging is not appealing to the target market. Videos should have a decent level of viewership. Low views show that students and their parents do not see the content as interesting and are not engaging with the resource. Social media should also meet certain levels of engagement, which



should continue to increase as the social media strategy is perfected. It's difficult to measure the level of success for billboards, but it's important to continue to evaluate locations based on the messaging and goal.

For both objectives, return-on-investment (ROI) will be an important metric, but it can be difficult to accurately measure. For example, a student or parent may view a banner ad and not click it, but later visits the school website. This visit would not be reflected in the data collected, but the banner ad did achieve a successful conversion. Therefore, ROI should be tracked, but the results should not solely dictate actions for a strategy. Decisions on a strategy should be influenced by a variety of metrics that support each other.

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MARKETING PLAN FOR COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

By

Kaylyn Cockrell


A Thesis Submitted to the

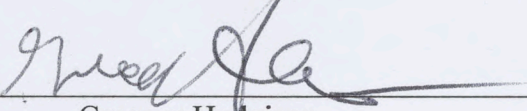
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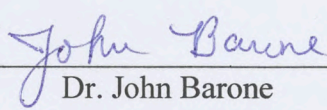
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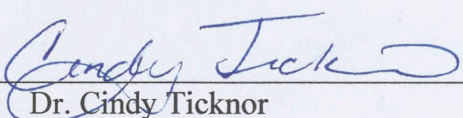
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