

**MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**  
**BOARD OF TRUSTEES STUDY SESSION**  
**JUNE 17, 2014**  
**MCCORMICK ROOM**  
**30 7TH STREET EAST**  
**ST. PAUL, MN**

**Board of Trustees Members Present:** Chair Clarence Hightower and Trustees Margaret Anderson Kelliher, Duane Benson, Alexander Cirillo, Cheryl Dickson, Dawn Erlandson, Philip Krinkie, Alfredo Oliveira, David Paskach, Maria Peluso, Thomas Renier, Elise Ristau, Louise Sundin, and Chancellor Rosenstone

**Leadership Council Representatives Present:** Carmen Shields, Sue Collins, Earl Potter III, Mary Jacobson

**Absent:** Trustees Ann Anaya and Michael Vekich

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**Study Session: Positioning Assessment and Brand Strategy Development Update**

**Convene**

Chair Clarence Hightower convened the study session at 3:00 p.m. Chair Higtower invited Chancellor Steven Rosenstone to introduce the update on the positioning assessment and brand strategy development. Chancellor Rosenstone reviewed the current situation and objectives.

**Current Situation**

1. The distinguishing features and unique characteristics of each MnSCU institution are among MnSCU's greatest strengths. These strengths however, present an ongoing challenge to our ability to communicate our collective value to the state and our contributions to the economy, the workforce, jobs, and the lives of Minnesotans.
2. Current positioning of MnSCU does not fully communicate what we offer students and does not adequately relay the benefits of public higher education, or result in meaningful connections with key audiences, or sufficiently differentiate us from the University of Minnesota, private and for-profit institutions.
3. Data show that awareness levels of MnSCU among prospective students, current students, parents, and other stakeholders are low. Data also show that the collective impact of MnSCU on the people of Minnesota and the state's economy is not well understood.
4. The challenge is how to communicate our collective value.

**Objectives**

- Strengthen the brand and positioning of each college and university.
- Improve the ability of each college and university to attract and serve students and communities.

- Increase awareness among key audiences, reinforce partnerships with communities and businesses, and increase strong support among opinion leaders and public officials, all of which results in increased enrollment and support for our colleges and universities. Give reasons for investing in one of MnSCU's institutions.

### **Steering Committee**

The Branding Steering Committee formed in January 2014. The committee includes six MnSCU presidents and 10 marketing and communications staff from campuses. Chancellor Rosenstone called upon President Earl Potter, St. Cloud State University.

### **Target Audiences**

The key audiences for the branding strategy are:

- prospective students
- influencers of prospective students (parents/families/high school guidance counselors/workforce center counselors/etc.)
- current students
- alumni
- donors
- elected and appointed officials
- community and business leaders
- industry partners and related state agencies
- residents of the state of Minnesota (metro and Greater Minnesota), especially those who live in the communities served by MnSCU colleges and universities
- faculty and staff

### **Request for Proposal**

A request for proposal was issued in February 2014. Eighteen proposals were received and reviewed by the steering committee. The top three agencies were interviewed. The steering committee felt PadillaCRT was the best partner to work on the objectives identified for this branding audit. PadillaCRT demonstrated that they understood the objectives, and their response and work plan were a good fit. They also had the qualifications and experience: a broad and varied portfolio of success with higher education and work with the University of Minnesota brand, making them familiar with our competitor. Their expertise in positioning brands was a good match on cost for value. PadillaCRT understands the power of a collective brand, and will work with stakeholders to figure out a way MnSCU can communicate that. The contract with PadillaCRT was finalized in May 2014.

President Sue Collins, Northeast Higher Education District (NHED), commented on the difficulty of branding the five institutions under the NHED brand and is excited to be a part of this team and to learn how to accomplish this collective branding strategy.

### **Building a Successful Brand**

The approach includes building a lasting identity that will be:

- Informed by inclusive research tightly linked to a process that builds consensus across the colleges and universities in the system

- Dynamic enough to engage faculty, staff, alumni, donors, board members, students, referral sources, civic leaders, and the community at large
- Tightly linked to MnSCU's Strategic Framework and Charting the Future (CTF) Initiative
- Able to create additional value without undermining the strength of the brand of each college and university

### **Approach**

Committed to understanding the array and figuring out the pieces to this collaborative puzzle, PadillaCRT will use:

- **Guiding principles:** Clear and common goals, fact-based recommendations, internal stakeholders (faculty, staff, and students) involved throughout
- **Research** – who to look at and study, include: for-profit institutions, UW, U of M. Need to ask a lot of questions
- **Phases:**
  - Current Assessment (including peers)
  - Constituent Research and insights
  - Positioning and Brand Strategy Options
  - Report and Recommendations
    - With the research, can tune and adjust strategies to develop the understanding.
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### **Phase I: Current Positioning and Brand Assessment**

- Understand how MnSCU colleges and universities reference their own brands as well as their connection to the system brand (brand identity and college speak, imagery, communication to audiences)
- Understand peer approaches as well as strategies that work in similarly complex organizations outside of higher education
  - Trends
  - Evidence of best practices
- Understand benefits, barriers, and points of difference of our state colleges and universities
  - Diversity and commonality of positioning
  - Use of MnSCU brand
- Develop positioning and brand strategy options and recommendations to strengthen the MnSCU brand and change the reality/current perception. That is the approach Padilla will take with the MnSCU brand. They will also work this strategy hand in hand with the current CTF initiative.

### **Phase II: Constituent Research and Insights**

Qualitative one-on-one interviews will include the following participants: alumni, prospective students, parents of prospective students, current students, business leaders, community leaders, college and university presidents, legislators, and members of the Board of Trustees. Individual populations with strong distinct identities will be surveyed.

### **Phase III: Develop and Present Positioning and Brand Strategy Options and Recommendations**

Carmen Shields, system office interim chief communications officer, explained that PadillaCRT is working hard not to make assumptions about the right brand strategy, but rather research brand strategy options and pair them with the brand issues discovered for MnSCU – which we plan to do the same.

#### **Brand Strategy Options:**

- House of Brands: strong individual brands, tied together loosely – if at all - by an umbrella brand, e.g., NHED
- Endorsed Brands: common umbrella identity attached to each entity, e.g., UW or car companies
- Dual Brands: parent organization and individual brands share platform equally, e.g., Disney and our campuses (such as Anoka-Ramsey and Anoka Community College)
- Hybrid Brands: mix of different options, e.g., Google and Adobe
- Branded House: all brands presented as a single identity, e.g., Apple

#### **Discussion**

Chancellor Rosenstone explained that we are not proposing that college and university brands go away. We want to make the collaboration and shared values a more powerful tool for each campus. PadillaCRT is a firm that understands the complexity of our branding problem.

President Potter responded to trustees' question by clarifying that this is a brand identity-positioning contract. It will provide tactics of how to market what we now define and it will be in the spirit of shared services enterprise – as a system – that is essential.

Ms. Shields concluded her portion and Chancellor Rosenstone introduced Mary Jacobsen, Director of Marketing and Public Relations at Anoka-Ramsey Community College and Anoka Technical College and a member of the *Charting the Future* engagement team.

Ms. Jacobsen explained that PadillaCRT will present up to three positioning and brand strategy options based on research, and will then test at least two of these options with key stakeholders: 42 total individual interviews; six people from each of the following groups: students, faculty and staff, prospective students, business and community leaders, alumni, MnSCU board members, and MnSCU presidents.

### **Phase IV: Final Report and Recommendations**

Recommended brand platforms and approaches for implementation may also include:

- Recommendations for a multi-institutional brand advisory board that will guide and oversee the brand over the long term
- Recommendations for structural and operational initiatives to gain acceptance and consistency
- Adjustments to brand style guidelines

- Tools to help quickly and easily evaluate individual treatments to support brand standards
- Training for brand stewards and ambassadors

President Collins added that the progress of the teams and where they are headed will be provided in email updates to the steering committee and they will work with the chancellor and chief information officer to determine the best path for moving forward.

### **Board Discussion**

Chancellor Rosenstone raised the question of how to engage the board's experience and progress. A decision will not be made without early board support and opportunities for discussion/input. Trustee Benson stated that the Board has been engaged before on this audit and needs to provide input for possible missing information. Chancellor Rosenstone explained that PadillaCRT will have a track record of work according to board policy.

### **Adjournment**

Chair Hightower adjourned the study session at 3:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Christine McGing, Recorder