

# Herrup, MacSwan & Associates

## **The Admission Audit: A Critical Marketing Communications Tool**

Herrup, MacSwan & Associates believes that the foundation for a truly effective marketing communications program begins with a thorough understanding of an institution's distinctive qualities, its core values and vision for the future, and the extent to which they inform and drive the policies and practices in the campus offices responsible for external affairs. Our experience has shown that the productivity and success of the admission, development, alumni affairs and even the career services and student affairs offices are increased significantly when they are aligned with the institution's values. Understanding and agreeing on a set of beliefs and objectives are not enough. Those offices responsible for representing the university or college to external constituents must exemplify, through their programs and actions, the qualities that make their institution distinctive and add value to the educational product they are presenting.

The admission office is frequently the most visible one working with external constituencies. The cyclical nature of the admission process also makes it the most agile and able to adapt to changes in the prospective student marketplace. As such, it is an ideal operation through which to undertake a close examination of how well its practices are aligned with the core values of the institution it represents. Senior administrators at colleges and universities around the country often take for granted that the office responsible for its most important outreach initiatives operates in a fashion that is consistent with the values of the institution. In some cases the alignment is excellent and our review reinforces the academic administration's confidence in the admission office. In other cases, making corrections to an operation that is misaligned with the ethos and vision of the institution almost always improves the outcomes of the office's activities and enables it to meet or exceed the goals and objectives of the college or university.

The Admission Audit begins with a series of conversations with the leadership of the college or university and a thorough review of all strategic documents and plans. The next step is to meet with members of the admissions and financial aid staff. We think it is important to meet with both the administrative and the operations staffs to develop a clear understanding of the operation, its strengths and challenges. Here are examples of the questions we explore with the head of admissions and financial aid and his/her staff:

- How clearly do the efforts of the office convey the core values and distinctive qualities of the institution?
- To what extent are those values a part of the staff mindset as they go about their daily affairs or when they plan new initiatives?
- How well are those values and distinctions reflected in the print and electronic communications vehicles used by the office?

- To what extent do the students and volunteers who work with the office understand, embrace and reflect those values?

At the conclusion of our assessment, we provide the college or university with a detailed summary of our findings and include a set of recommendations. The benefit of undertaking this kind of evaluation is in the specificity of the action items included in the recommendations. At the request of the client, HMA associates work with the office and the institution to implement the recommendations.

Feel free to contact us at [HMA@hma.cc](mailto:HMA@hma.cc) for more information.