



**COMMITTEE ON MARKETING, PUBLIC RELATIONS  
AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Telephone Conference Call**

**November 18, 2019**

**123 Tigert Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL**

**Time Convened: 3:03 p.m.**

**Time Adjourned: 3:38 p.m.**

**Committee and Board members present:**

Robert G. Stern (Chair), Daniel T. O'Keefe, Ray G. Thomas, and Anita Zucker

**Others present:**

Nancy Paton, Vice President for Strategic Communications and Marketing, and other members of the university community.

**1.0 Call to Order and Welcome**

Committee Chair Stern welcomed everyone to the meeting. He expressed that two critical strategic initiatives would be discussed: an update of the Issues Management and Crisis Preparedness Strategy, and an update on the Brand and Positioning Strategy. Lastly, a review of the restructuring of the central communications and marketing organization was presented.

**2.0 Roll Call**

Board Staff called the roll and noted those Trustees who were in attendance.

**3.0 Discussion Items**

**3.1 Issues Management and Crisis Preparedness Strategy**

Vice President Paton reminded the committee of six strategies underway to ensure the creation of contemporary communications practices to successfully plan for and manage issues and crises. The goal is to create a best-in-class organization in support of UF's top five aspiration.

She related that the creation of an issues and crisis preparedness strategy, and the internal assessment of current practices and protocol has been completed. The findings will be reviewed with campus leadership.

Key components of the assessment:

- A wide range of stakeholders representing all aspects of UF were interviewed.
- An extensive review of existing issues and crisis preparedness documents was conducted. A review of the practices of top 5 public universities was completed.
- Two peer schools, UVA and UNC were interviewed.

The assessment focused on seven key areas related to best practices in issues management and crisis preparedness.

- Environmental Challenges
- Organization and Capabilities
- UF's Issues and Crisis Culture
- UF's Existing Issues and Crisis Materials
- Technology
- Protocols and Processes
- Collaborative Structures, Education and Training

The assessment yielded the following:

- Higher education is prone to issues and crises, and UF is no exception to this. In fact, UF is more vulnerable to issues and crises because of our size and complexity, our prominent athletics program, and our geographic location.
- UF is culturally aligned around communicating authentically and transparently during crises. This is critical (and not overly common). Senior leadership, including President Fuchs and, the Board of Trustees, have helped to drive this culture. In addition to this, communicators across campus have great instincts. A major area of opportunity here is that the SCM team is small, though mighty. As you know, in the next few months the university will be making major strides to shape a world-class plan.
- Great relationships have formed across the institution. UF is a unique place in that regard. We rely heavily on these relationships in issues and crises, which is obviously a positive, but we have a need and opportunity to ensure our practices and processes are documented so we increase our across-the-board knowledge, nimbleness and clarity.
- Areas collaborate extremely well at UF. For example, IFAS, UF Health, and Athletics, are well integrated with central campus administration, including SCM. This is a considerable positive and strength.
- According to external partners, UF, despite having a new team in SCM, is not far behind its peer institutions in its ability to handle issues and crises. The major difference between the elite publics and UF, besides having more robust and mature Communications & Marketing teams at the central administration level, is their investment in addressing former or longer-term areas of reputational vulnerability. UNC and UVA, especially, have implemented innovative initiatives around sexual assault and diversity and inclusion.
- As a result of the assessment, critical recommendations have been created aligned to the seven aforementioned focus areas.
- Work is already underway on several of them, including strengthening the SCM bench, mapping the key media influencers for UF, configuring the Command Center to manage communications and issues/crises, and developing a process for ensuring thoughtful and timely escalation approaches.

In addition to these initiatives, the university will move forward soon on:

- Expanding the crisis communications playbooks and supporting materials to include more robust communications processes and resources.
- Hosting crisis communications planning workshops.
- Conducting more regular crisis simulations to test the effectiveness of our communications processes, protocols, materials, and resources.

### **3.2 Brand Positioning and Strategy Update**

Vice President Paton reviewed the project timeline, which is in the discovery phase and qualitative market research phase and beginning our preparations to enter into quantitative research early in 2020. Just this past week, meetings were held on site with campus stakeholders to garner their views of the university. From these meetings we learned that the campus community is excited and supportive of this effort.

The discovery phase consists of conducting a thorough review of central and unit-based marketing planning documents and communications to comprehend the University of Florida's differentiators, challenges, strengths and opportunities.

- In conjunction with the materials review, a brand and competitor assessment for the University of Florida will be completed along with a comprehensive review of the ten private and public universities brand positions.
- The assessment will provide an audit of the current brand strategy, messaging and visual identity for the university and its competitors as well as notable brand experience observations, key strengths and challenges.
- Input from the campus stakeholder meetings, review/analysis and external peer group assessment efforts will form the basis of the quantitative market research phase.
- Each of the committee members will be invited to participate in a conversation to gather insights on UF.

Chair Stern thanked Vice President Paton for the update on the work being done to advance the important goal of building a distinctive national brand.

Chair Stern stated that the Strategic Communications and Marketing plan can only be as successful as team strength. The committee is aware Vice President Paton is focused on building a world-class strategic communications and marketing team to propel UF into the top five.

### **3.3 Infrastructure Update**

Vice President Paton stated that she has begun efforts to elevate and expand team expertise, effectiveness and excellence.

- AVP of Communications – Search completed/Internal candidate appointed
- AVP of Marketing – Search Re-opened

- Senior Director, Digital/Social Engagement & Innovation Internal promotion
- Associate Director of Learning, Development and Integration – Internal promotion

The following leaders are being recruited:

- Director of Communications (expanded scope)
- Director of Marketing and Brand Management(new)
- Director of Issues & Crisis Management (new)
- Sr. Marketing Strategist (new)

#### **4.0 New Business**

None currently.

#### **5.0 Adjourn**

Committee Chair Stern adjourned the meeting at 3:38 p.m.