

Towson University Identity Audit Research Executive Summary

Research Objectives

- Establish a benchmark for current perceptions of the Towson University brand, as compared to its competitive set (including direct competitors, peers, and aspirants).
- Provide an informed approach to strategic brand development, as well as future decision-making.
- Foster consensus among internal constituencies.

Methodology

- 20-minute online survey (separately focus groups, phone interviews, and a brand workshop)
- Conducted in October, 2016

Audiences

- Insiders (n=913): Those with an existing relationship with Towson University Students, Alumni, Parents, Faculty, Staff
- Outsiders (n=806): Members of the general population age 15+ residing within Towson's recruiting footprint Greater Baltimore (300), Other Maryland (200), New York City (~75), Philadelphia (~75), Tampa (~75), Virginia Tidewater area (~75)

Participation

- 1,719 total completes

Competitive Set

- University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP)
- University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC)
- Salisbury University
- University of Delaware (UD)
- Penn State University (PSU)
- Stevenson University
- James Madison University (JMU)
- George Mason University (GMU)

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Executive Summary – Research Findings

- Overall, the Towson University brand is solid and in good standing, maybe even more so than anticipated. **Awareness is strong. Perceptions are positive.** In moving forward, we can purposely establish and consistently communicate a unique brand idea, instead of having to shift negative perceptions. This is good news. Creating (or reinforcing) perceptions is much easier than shifting existing ones.
- **Faculty do not expect a dramatic shift** in the brand; instead, they feel that the essential elements are in place. It's now a matter of using what Towson already has and applying greater leverage. **We have a lot of good things to build on.**
- **There is clearly a sense that Towson is shifting, and the university is moving in is the right direction.** Not only do respondents say that perceptions are shifting; they also strongly associate ascending and growing with Towson's brand personality.
- Looking at the general population (the most realistic view of the competitive marketplace), Towson has high awareness, sitting just behind the University of Maryland College Park and the University of Maryland Baltimore County. Towson slightly leads Penn State University Park on awareness.
- The University of Maryland College Park is, not surprisingly, the strong marketplace leader — it's the most prestigious, it has a well-established reputation, it's the top choice, it's academically strong, and it offers a breadth of majors and programs. This institution leads on the consideration list. However, Towson leads the next tier down on consideration, performing strong against a competitive group that includes UMD Baltimore County, Delaware, and Penn State University Park.
- **Towson does have some progress to make in terms of brand reputation.** While it's high on the consideration lists, the school performs much lower on brand reputation. This indicates that Towson excels in other areas, being more of a value choice and delivering on this important rational need.
- **Right now, Towson is not considered very unique or distinctive.** In fact this is one of the biggest challenges of the brand: it's considered by the general population to be more average and unknown.
- What does the Towson brand currently represent today? **Above all, it stands for three key ideas: value, being nurturing and supportive, and growing in the right direction.** Not only do TU insiders see this, but outsiders (the general population) see this as well.
- As for brand assets, the top five strengths associated with Towson include value, price, location, teacher's college, and big school with small school feel. The general population credits Towson more with location and being commuter-friendly, but they don't see the "big school with small school feel" idea. This idea is truly unique to Towson and should be built upon.
- **Among Towson's prospective students, diversity plays a critical role.** This is an important driver for prospects, and, in their eyes, Towson delivers on this need. So diversity represents a very

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Executive Summary – Research Findings (continued)

real and tangible opportunity for the university and will be an important part of messaging for this audience.

- **Towson has a strong connection to perceptions of being a teacher’s college.** This is primarily viewed as one of the university’s strengths. While some see this perception as a challenge, the future will require translating the teacher’s college foundation into values for the future. **Commuter school perceptions present a hurdle, but more so internally than externally.**
- **Respondents describe Towson as growing/ascending today,** but by design this should help get the university to a new place in the future. Insiders have real expectations that the university should move to a more respectable, progressive, and leading position in the future.
- **Personality-wise, Towson exudes warmth and friendliness, and projects positivity and optimism. Prospects also consider Towson to be diverse and inclusive.**
- The positioning opportunities we tested point the way for strategy and messaging. A number of the ideas tested were well received. **The “nurturing/supportive” and “value” ideas were the most consistently embraced by all audiences.** Both will likely play a significant role in strategy development. There were some audience-specific nuances. For example, parents, alumni, and faculty/staff were more responsive to the idea of “tomorrow’s leaders.” Prospects, who place such high importance on diversity, were very responsive to the **“opportunities for all”** idea — perhaps a critical part of messaging to this young/incoming audience. The “serving Maryland” and “explore” ideas were the weakest performers overall.
- **Creative concepts should work on dialing up uniqueness and distinction (for the “supportive/nurturing” idea, for example), thus imbuing the next phase of concepts and ideas with a flavor that is uniquely Towson’s.**
- Total awareness numbers for the 150th anniversary campaign are strong, but clearly the campaign has made much more progress penetrating the student and faculty audiences than alumni and parents. Naturally, the overall campaign is viewed as having more impact than the TV spots alone. It is questionable whether this campaign had enough push or support behind it to create a significant impact.
- Perhaps to Towson’s surprise, there was significantly more love for the existing flag logo than for the 150th anniversary version. This was true of all audiences, but especially prospective students.
- Based on survey participation, there do seem to be **alumni engagement issues.** This group is proud of Towson University; however, they just are not feeling the welcoming, friendly personality and tone as strongly as the other insider groups are.