

Towson University

— 07.20.17 —

Discovery Report

REPORT OUTLINE

1 Overview

2 Competitive Landscape

3 Observations from Intake

4 Implications

5 Next Steps

OVERVIEW

OVERVIEW

After confirmation of the ideas outlined in this document, Lipman Hearne will move into the next phases of work.



Brand Discovery & Creative Development

- Engagement Kickoff
- Materials and Research Review
- Campus Intake
- **Discovery Memo**
- Brand Platform
- Key Messages
- Message Testing
- Creative Concept
- Brand Guide

Visual ID Development & Brand Implementation

- Graphic Identity
- Graphic ID Guide
- Internal Marketing Rollout Plan
- Training Workshops

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

In order to develop a focused brand and key messages, audiences must be prioritized.

Towson's strategic team expressed a desire to address issues surrounding reputation and prestige. Since these goals are more about external perceptions, we have identified the following audiences:

PRIMARY AUDIENCES:

- Prospective Students and their parents
- Alumni

SECONDARY AUDIENCES:

- Faculty/Staff
- Donors
- Current Students and their parents
- Community Partners

COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE

Competitive Audit

PURPOSE/METHODOLOGY

An understanding of the competitive landscape is essential for understanding how Towson can differentiate itself.

In order to evaluate the landscape we reviewed:

- Towson's existing competitive assessment
- Institutional websites, including the homepage, "About Us" page(s), admissions page(s), academic page(s), and any other easily accessible pages that could contain messaging
- *US News & World Report*
- unigo.com

COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE-LEAD MESSAGES

| Claim |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| Personalized approach /passion | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Research focused, innovative | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Diversity | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Warm/ Welcoming | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| Big/public school, small feel | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Leadership development | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Fearless, daring spirit | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | |

KEY FINDINGS: LANDSCAPE

Across the majority of the themes explored, multiple institutions claimed a version of each message. It will be key to ensure Towson clarifies how it does some of these things differently, or how the combination ladders up to a unique package.

One message Towson uses which was not as evident in the competitor positioning is the welcoming nature of the University. It will be important to make sure this positive does not come at the expense of rigor and academics which will be key to prestige.

OBSERVATIONS FROM INTAKE

METHODOLOGY

Lipman Hearne visited Towson's campus to meet with key audiences June 28-29, 2017.

Participants were told that a Lipman Hearne team member would be taking notes, that their comments would not be attributed directly back to a specific individual, and that this work was being done as part of the University's branding process. Attendees from Lipman Hearne included:

- Alexia Koelling (Executive Vice President)
- Derrick Rivers (Creative Director)
- Rachel Skybetter (Senior Writer)
- Matt Mefford (Senior Digital Art Director)
- Vatonna Dunn (Account Executive)

METHODOLOGY

Lipman Hearne held discussion groups or interviews with the following:

- University Marketing and Communications Senior Leadership
- Towson University Brand Team
- President's Council
- President
- Faculty
- Staff
- Freshmen Students
- Transfer/Graduate Students
- BTU Council Members
- Division of Marketing and Communications
- Community Members/Alums/Donors/Board Members

LEGACY AND EVOLUTION

Towson University's 150-year legacy gives it a certain level of legitimacy: quantified proof of Towson's history, survival, and success as an institution of higher education. At the same time, the University has gracefully evolved in size, rigor, diversity, and its evolution from a teacher's college to a comprehensive university, proving its nimbleness—a characteristic that rarely coincides with age.

These two attributes—deep roots and nimble nature—will be crucial to the University's positioning.

LEGACY AND EVOLUTION

The discussion groups surfaced key insights related to Towson's present environment:

- Although established in name, Towson University is still evolving.
- Towson has challenges with establishing strong traditions, which directly impacts the student experience, engagement of alumni, and general school pride.
- Session participants perceive the University as “noninstitutional” because of its flexibility, welcoming community, and support of new ideas.

"We're nimble, pull-your-bootstraps-up, and get things done. Towson has been ready to meet people's needs, and is transitioning constantly. More prospective students are starting to have Towson as a reach school."

– BTU session participant

"There's a real sense that Towson is this underdog, with a great sense of potential." – Faculty member

"We're still very much becoming and that's one of the things I love." – Faculty member

"I volunteer with the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Within an hour I was able to organize a meeting of 10 people, and that's what I love about Towson. If you want to do something and it sounds good, everyone is on board and it happens." – Staff

THE TOWSON STORY

There is a need to communicate the Towson of today to break free of the teacher's college and second-best state school narrative many know. The teacher's college legacy overshadows Towson's other strengths, while the second-best state school narrative falls short of highlighting specific examples of why Towson is a noteworthy option.

- Session participants have trouble identifying examples or stories that differentiate Towson from competitors that are big schools with a small feel.
- Anchor or marquee programs aren't touted or easily identifiable, and there is a sense that the University tries to be "everything to everyone," which can thwart efforts towards differentiation.
- Even 20 years after becoming Towson University, the surrounding community still refers to Towson as Towson State.

"The contemporary story of Towson hasn't been told."

– President

"I think we try to be everything to everyone, as opposed to being Towson, and it's OK to say no sometimes. We have all these people trying to do things with us, and we half-ass it, and it falls apart. We need to figure out who we really are."

– Brand team participant

*"Alumni think of who we **were**, as a teaching college with 10,000 people. Not as a 20,000-plus, Division-1 university." – Marketing strategy session participant*

GROWTH

When session participants described Towson's momentum, there was a default to growth in both size and number of programs.

- There is a need for Towson to translate growth into something tangible for internal and external audiences, to distill it into meaningful points of differentiation.
- Instead of defaulting to the "big school small feel" phrase, Towson should unpack what this means for its audiences.

The following slide provides examples of participants who gave context to what growth and size does for the University and the students.

"There are fewer degrees of separation with 150,000 alumni. At speaking engagements, the president always asks, 'If you graduated from Towson, raise your hand.' We always have someone out there."

– Strategy session participant

"We're a school of 22,000 but only 5,000 live on campus. We're not talking about the small class sizes, the interactions you can have with the professors, or the research opportunities. We're focused on the numbers piece, not what it means for you. We have to talk about the benefits not the attributes."

– Brand team participant

"I try to talk about the idea that we're a big school that feels small without taking down Maryland. I talk about the undergraduate experience, where a student can really feel like they belong and the beautiful campus."

– Faculty member

"The faculty relationships are a big reason I came here. I didn't want to be in a giant lecture hall. I got to meet a professor beforehand—I wasn't even her student yet and she cared about me."

– Undergraduate student

"We've seen long-term growth and expansion on campus, both physical and enrollment. We added PhD programs—we're making knowledge here now. The widening of the student experience has changed, as has the breadth of out-of-class programs." – Strategy session participant

IMPRESSIVE BUT WIDELY UNKNOWN ACCOMPLISHMENTS

As audiences become affiliated with Towson, they discover it is a hidden treasure. Within its welcoming community there are pockets of surprising accomplishments or proof points that showcase Towson's impact.

IMPRESSIVE BUT WIDELY UNKNOWN ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Apart from maintaining its spot as the No. 1 producer of teachers in the state of Maryland, Towson University has many successful programs:

- Towson produces the most business degrees in the state
- One in every five healthcare professionals is a Towson graduate, which resonates well with legislators
- Towson's cyber security program is one of 16 programs in the nation
- Towson receives accolades for its arts programming

"The faculty who teach at this University are rock stars ... but few of them would think they're rock stars. There's not a sense of 'I'm really important and you should know that.' It's, 'I'm making a difference and doing my job.'" – Faculty member

"The impact the institution has on the state and the region is undocumented, so people can't articulate proof points." – President

*"There's no aspect of my children's lives that isn't touched by Towson—their teachers, where I gave birth, the accountant I used. I don't know if we talk about the personal, emotional aspect. We touch people as close to home as we can get."
– BTU session participant*

*"I think because we grew as a student-centered institution, we feel uncomfortable talking about faculty."
– Faculty session participant*

PRIDE/HUMILITY

Although Towson has substantial proof points to tout, discussion sessions reveal that Towson affiliates do not openly express pride. A hesitancy to showcase pride leads to challenges with identifying stories that articulate “Towson now.”

- Towson needs to identify sources of pride beyond athletics.
- Towson has many successful programs, yet there is a self-perception that Towson’s rigor is subpar compared to peers.
- Many faculty are humble, yet some wish more recognition is given for their teaching and their work. As Towson continues to build its reputation for research, its tenured faculty struggle with their identity as they face comparisons with their peers who have more research emphasis.

PRIDE/HUMILITY

In contrast to the humility expressed by some, it was reported that recent graduates can compare their preparedness with that of their peers, they are reaping the outcomes Towson has to offer, and therefore are expressing their pride. The older alumni we met with, who are very engaged with the University, witness Towson's contrast from when they attended in prior years.

"People seem to be scared to get out there and be passionate about Towson. People who are proud of it need to clarify their pride."

– President's Council session

"I've noticed a growing sense of pride about the institution. Alumni have that tangible pride as we've grown in size. I've seen people wear the shirts around more." – BTU session

"One person would wear a TU shirt doing yard work but an MD shirt when they go out."

– President's council

"We're proud of our school, but it's hidden that you went there versus College Park—you know within 5 seconds if someone went to College Park." – Alum

"Everyone is comfortable being good, not great. People like when I brag about Towson because they haven't heard that voice." – President

THE TOWSON STUDENT

Majority of the faculty and staff that we spoke with have been with Towson for three years or more. When asked why they stay, they cite Towson's students among their top reasons.

Across sessions, the Towson student is described as being hard-working, intelligent, open-minded and well-prepared for joining the workforce.

THE TOWSON STUDENT

Towson students demonstrate grit through their focused work ethic, juggling classes, jobs, and on-campus involvement, a contrast with the stereotype of the typical party-focused college student. 90% of Towson students have jobs, yet take their education seriously and are interested in performing well.

- Towson students are knowledgeable about community and national issues, and also challenge the University administration to address issues on campus.
- Towson's environment molds capable students into tomorrow's leaders.

"There's quite a range, but overall they're really open to learning and you can see the difference that you're making, because they're open to changing the way they see things. A lot of our students work, so maybe they value their education more." – Faculty

"Somebody said to me – 'Towson, why do their kids get all the jobs?' That was great to me, it speaks to this culture of excellence." – Faculty

"Towson students are really in touch, we are the realest they get. I learned how to manage my schedule, and work with administrators. Other students you send into the world, they can't talk to anyone. Towson students, we can talk to people." – Alum

"Our students are hungry, they lean in. They care about each other and the world. They are generous. They're collaborative, they look beyond themselves, they want to have intellectual and artistic relationships with faculty. They're a joy to work with. They're poised to do things." – Faculty

"This concept of grit, scrappiness—they're very hungry. There are a lot of people who are working full-time, they're here, they're vested. It's a get stuff done group—faculty, staff, students, throughout. I think for a lot of people that does resonate. Grit is a popular phrase in the higher ed space. "Determined". I really think TU is that. Grit keeps you going through that. It's an attribute that I don't think we talk about a lot."

– Brand team participant

"A lot of our students are a working, gritty, scrappy, get stuff done group. That's a thread we see over and over again and it's great. Grit means determined and implies completion. Even as we change as an institution, grit keeps us going through the change. I'm proud to be associated with that." – Brand team participant

THE TOWSON COMMUNITY

Staff and faculty adopt a compassionate, yet “keep it real” approach, which helps Towson students find their track and embrace challenges, which fosters meaningful faculty/student relationships.

Students also demonstrate kindness toward each other, from collaborating in classes to aiding each other in wayfinding.

This thoughtfulness extends beyond individuals. There is a social justice mind-set that permeates the community.

"We are an institution that fits snowflake students, they want high-touch education experiences. The individual nature in a community is hard to find, it fosters a sense of self but there is a strong community aspect." – President

"It's not just the professors that I've found helpful, it's the other students, too. I was able to get great recommendations and connections through the network here." – Undergraduate student

"The people—the students—are why I stay. The people here are just really good people. They have that twinkle in their eyes and they look at us as their extended family." – Staff member

"There is a social justice theme emerging on the arts side, and the President has been talking about it a lot. There are pockets of commitments to social justice that pop up across campus, such as through student government and student life. That's a niche that I don't think has really been talked about much, it's a real difference in the Towson today." – Brand team participant

THE TOWSON COMMUNITY: DIVERSITY

Although Towson's diversity is represented in numbers, student session participants suggest that Towson does not always feel inclusive. Many groups are not integrated well, and students wish they could experience diversity without having to join multiple clubs while balancing jobs and school work.

"Every minority sticks to itself. There isn't much intermingling. There has to be a way to do events for everyone instead of for one particular group. In order to branch out, you have to join multiple organizations."

– Student

"Classes are diverse, but in the real world, you see this person, say hi, and keep going with your life."

– Student

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In addition to reputable programs, Towson heavily emphasizes volunteerism and community partnerships. Students are highly engaged volunteers, ranked #6 in the nation for community service hours, and staff and faculty are also actively involved.

Community partnerships are exemplified through:

- The Institute for Well-Being, dedicated to promoting health and wellness in the community
- Arts programming in Baltimore
- Volunteering with older adults
- Need-based summer programs for children

There is an internal perception that work needs to be done to reestablish trust with the community in terms of follow-through on initiatives.

*"Towson has really bridged the gap in the community. The current president has been connecting with the community, state ... she's everywhere and listening. It seems to be a huge shift."
– Community member/donor/alum session*

"What contributes to the Towson story? Our commitment to the surrounding Baltimore area." – Staff

*"We have a reputation for a lack of follow-through. There's a negative stigma about Towson's relationship with Baltimore city. Some feel we just dug the hole deeper. There's always work to be done."
– BTU session participant*

IMPLICATIONS

COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS – TOWSON TODAY

Towson needs to talk about who Towson is now, and where it's going in the future. The growth has been thoughtful and deliberate, but not at the expense of the entrepreneurial spirit that thrives on campus. To do this effectively and compellingly Towson cannot be afraid/too humble to talk about the successes and points of pride so there is a shared understanding, both internally and externally, of who Towson is, who its faculty are, and what Towson does for its students.

COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS – SIZE

Towson needs to move beyond talking about growth and assuming that the audience understands why that is important and start to unpack for audiences what the impacts of the growth/size are—both what the students have access and exposure to, and what the large number of graduates do in Maryland and the world.

COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS – OUTCOMES

There is opportunity to talk about what a Towson graduate can do and how they are ready for the workforce because of their experiences and time on campus. And, that people with Towson degrees are leaders across fields.

COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS – ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

Towson has all of the benefits of being 150 years old (reputation in teaching, trust that comes from being around a long time, the extensive alumni base), but having only been Towson University for 20 years, or a university at all for 40 years allows the University to be adapting to the needs of the students and the state.

This is not a place bogged down in a “this is how we’ve always done it” mind-set. This unique position, and what it means for the student experience, can be a compelling message.

COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS – COMMUNITY

The supportive nature of Towson should be communicated , but it will be important to showcase the aspects of the environment that allow for open dialogue (e.g., Freedom Square) and create a safe space where students can be pushed beyond your comfort zones. If not managed carefully, a “supportive community” message could convey a lack of rigor, or a university for struggling students.

COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS – TOWSON PERSONALITY

The Towson person is humble, hungry, nimble, not afraid of hard work, willing to give back, and ready to learn and take on the world, and so is Towson. This should inform the personality, but also needs to inform the key messages.

COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS – ACADEMICS

As noted above, the classwork is not “easy” and the student is not afraid of hard work. There is an opportunity to talk about academics at Towson. What does it mean to be in classrooms with professors/experts? What does it mean to be in smaller classes? There is an opportunity to talk about learning from those who are defining the fields and you will have their attention, and to talk about some of the research that is being done that is impacting students, or the world.

DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

In order to influence pride and tell the Towson Now story there is an opportunity to push the creative to be bolder in both storytelling and visuals. Ideally, expanding out the secondary color palette, exploring a slight font refresh, and finding a more ownable photographic style.

The current institutional logo does not replicate well digitally and should be addressed. Additionally, it will be important to clarify when to use the institutional logo and when to use TU. And, if TU continues to be used more broadly, it will be important to standardize how/when to use it. Should there be a brand architecture/logo lock up for different departments? With which mark? Etc.

NEXT STEPS

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1



2

Brand Discovery & Creative Development

- Engagement Kickoff
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Brand Platform



Message Map

SUPPORT MESSAGE 1

**SUPPORT
MESSAGE 2**

**SUPPORT
MESSAGE 4**

CORE MESSAGE

SUPPORT MESSAGE 3