

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

Wolfpack Rising

Continuing to Advance the Brand and Reputation of NC State

Strategic Planning Task Force Report, August 2020

Introduction

Institutional brand and reputation are among the most valuable assets held by any reputable organization. A statistical analysis by the Reputation Institute of the world's largest companies showed that product perceptions explained only 39% of people's purchase intentions. In contrast, 61% of their choices were explained by their perceptions of the organizations — the brands — behind those products or services. Brands have tremendous economic value, too. An audit of Coca-Cola Corp., for example, found the Coca-Cola brand — not its product — to be its single most valuable asset.

The corporate world has known for some time, and institutions of higher education are quickly learning, that strong brands push strong reputations and carry a great deal of tangible value. Consumers regularly choose recognized brands, and they will pay even more for a premium brand as compared to a mass-market brand. The same concept holds true in higher education: students, faculty, donors, alumni and partners want to be associated with excellent brands and will choose and invest in strong and well-known brands over weaker or unknown ones.

Simply put: Branding is critical, and branding and reputation are integrally connected.

A university's brand has real reputational and commercial value, whether by attracting high-caliber students, faculty, donors and collaborative projects, or through partnerships, licensing agreements and sponsorships.

So what does this mean for NC State?

NC State's brand is a strategic asset with tangible value. It has proven effective in helping to improve rankings, attract the brightest students and best faculty, inspire record amounts of donor giving, enhance employee and alumni pride, and encourage community support. NC State's brand helps attract and secure mutually beneficial partnerships, sponsorships and agreements with private-sector businesses that want to be associated with the university. In addition, NC State's brand serves to focus the internal community on who we are, what we stand and strive for and how we interact with the world around us.

Because of brand-focused efforts over the last few years, NC State's reputation is stronger than ever, and the university community recognizes the power of a strong brand. A broad range of feedback from across the institution makes it clear the Wolfpack wants to continue aggressively

enhancing NC State's brand and reputation to fuel the university's efforts to reach its potential and make a bigger impact on the world.

In this report, the task force explores how to enhance and promote NC State's brand and reputation not only within the state, but across the nation and around the world.

How We Got Here

To understand the task force's recommended next steps in advancing NC State's brand and reputation, it is helpful to understand how the university became an institution that embraces, values and seeks to improve its brand and reputation.

A Decade Ago: The Wild West of Branding

In 2010, NC State's brand-related efforts largely consisted of a loosely connected collection of disparate logos, color schemes and messages produced by colleges, schools, programs and units. These assets flooded the marketplace and competed against one another for attention, while creating ongoing confusion about the university. For too long, this was the reality at NC State.

Similar to many large public universities, communications functions at NC State did not begin as a central, aligned or collaborative effort. As the university grew throughout the years, colleges and units contracted work or hired communicators to address specific needs. As this trend progressed, there was simultaneously a lack of central structure, direction or communications guidelines. This environment resulted in the Wild West of branding: units creating their own logos, messages and even color schemes, inundating the marketplace with a variety of images and confusing the public. At the beginning of the last strategic plan, NC State was presenting itself as a loose collection of multiple identities rather than a strong, unified brand identity that benefits all colleges, units and entities associated with the university.

In 2011, a year into the tenure of Chancellor Randy Woodson, NC State launched an aggressive 10-year strategic plan. University leadership recognized that to achieve its ambitious strategic plan goals, NC State needed to vastly improve its communications infrastructure and output to more effectively communicate the reality of a strong and improving university. Leadership understood and supported the importance of improving NC State's brand and reputation. The unified University Communications department (now University Communications and Marketing, or UComm) was created and charged with championing this critical endeavor.

The First Step: Branding

The foundational step in this process was to lead the university through a research-oriented, highly collaborative process to identify and establish a strong NC State brand. An effective branding process provides a robust framework for excellent communications that improve reputation, facilitate collaboration and help the university achieve its goals.

Research and Consensus Building

A critical part of the process, and the bedrock of a strong brand, is high-quality research. The only way to pinpoint the university's true brand was by discovering how NC State's internal and external audiences perceived the institution. Research clarifies facts and removes speculation. It informs decision-making and allows an institution to focus on messages that position the university for success.

NC State's branding process began with 12 weeks of intensive research. In addition to gathering data, research presented a tremendous opportunity to gain buy-in from campus and other key constituents, and to build consensus. All constituent groups had ample opportunities to voice their opinions up front. The branding team conducted email surveys and focus groups with students, faculty, staff and alumni; held open meetings, small-group forums and large discussion groups with stakeholders ranging from finance and athletics to university leaders; commissioned a statewide survey to understand how the general public and business and opinion leaders perceived NC State; and hosted one-on-one meetings with board members, key donors and other high-profile leaders.

Mountains of valuable data were generated that revealed where NC State stood in the hearts and minds of key stakeholder groups, and how the university compared to peer institutions. For example, research showed there was strong awareness of NC State, but a serious lack of understanding about the university's many strengths. Data also showed that people's beliefs were based on outdated perceptions and that there was no clear consensus among internal or external audiences about NC State's competitive advantages. People's perceptions of the university's strengths were well behind their perceptions of our in-state and some out-of-state peers and were not at all reflective of the university's excellence.

Internal Audit and Report

During the research phase, the university also conducted an internal brand audit. Brand leaders met with deans and communicators in colleges and units and reviewed reams of print material, websites and direct communications. They gathered information about resources, processes, practices and staffing. The audit proved that NC State's inconsistent messaging and multiple visual identities were not effectively using limited resources, undercutting communications efforts across the institution and harming how the university presented itself. In other words, many of these efforts were hurting rather than helping NC State's reputation.

The research and consensus-building phase ended with an in-depth report of findings and recommendations, which also included information on peers, competitors and marketplace trends. The process produced expert recommendations and was broadly shared with campus partners through numerous meetings and communications materials that explained the data and recommendations.

Preparing a Strategic Foundation

Next was an eight-week strategy development phase, using focus groups to help determine what the brand would communicate about NC State. Building on the research findings, brand leaders met with dozens of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff and alumni,

engaging them in an interactive and iterative process to write the brand platform. Each group further developed and defined the work from preceding stages.

The last step of this critical phase was a leadership retreat. Thirty-four senior administrators, deans, trustees, faculty, staff and student leaders met for a day to come to a unified agreement on NC State's new brand platform.

University leaders engaged deeply in meaningful discussions about who we are and about our key audiences and differentiators. Listening to one another's points of view led to a greater understanding of the brand and a stronger sense of teamwork. Leaders made final decisions about the brand platform, which includes NC State's positioning statement and the brand's promise, drivers and personality (brand.ncsu.edu/platform).

A Monumental Step Forward

Having students, faculty, staff, administrators and board leaders agree on a one-page statement about who NC State is and how we would represent ourselves going forward was a powerful step. Never before in the history of the university had the institution been so focused on — or clear about — its identity. This process helped university leadership and the broader campus community understand, respect and own the brand.

The process laid the foundation for marketing communications success at NC State.

Developing the Brand Toolkit

Several months into the brand refresh process, it was finally time for the fun stuff: developing core brand elements such as guidelines for visual identity, key messages, and voice and tone. The branding process never ends, and our communications should reflect that constant evolution, so information and brand assets were (and still are) shared primarily through an online toolkit, brand.ncsu.edu.

At this time, "Think and Do" was also unveiled as a simple yet potent summary of the brand platform. This memorable statement captures the essence of the institution's personality and communicates what makes NC State different from — and, we think, better than — our competition.

Rolling Out the Brand — A Community Effort

The initial brand toolkit was completed in spring 2014. University leadership, deans and campus communicators were vital in successfully launching the visible brand effort and using these community brand tools. Once the academic year began in the fall, NC State rolled out more brand executions, including a redesigned homepage and core website, videos and ads. "Think and Do" was everywhere. Thanks to focused efforts across campus, we witnessed the focus and quality of communications improve within a few months. For the first time, NC State looked, sounded and felt like an outstanding, united entity.

In April 2015, a little more than two years after launching the brand refresh process, the chancellor issued a memo announcing the official campuswide adoption of NC State's brand

standards (brand.ncsu.edu/letter). Due to our research-oriented collaborative process and exceptional universitywide teamwork, there was essentially no pushback. In fact, there was tremendous appreciation and supportive feedback for the process and ongoing efforts.

The rest is history. Building on this foundation, in the five years since the official launch of the brand, tremendous efforts by central, college and unit communicators — as well as faculty, staff and students across the university — have gone into consistently elevating and advancing NC State’s brand presence. And we’re not done yet.

Inside-Out Brand Marketing Approach

Brand implementation, marketing and communications efforts necessarily took an inside-out approach. For the brand implementation and related reputation elevation to be successful, it was critical that NC State’s brand excellence was first realized, embraced and promoted by those currently closest to the university: our students, faculty, staff, alumni and donors. Much effort went into involving and educating our university community about NC State’s brand and key drivers, while ensuring a visually and textually consistent brand. Getting “Think and Do” embedded in the NC State experience as it now is, for example, took a considerable amount of time and work.

Available resources have also focused on influencing and changing perceptions within the Triangle, state and region, where NC State was not being recognized on the same level as our neighboring RTP universities or some out-of-state peers, or for its excellence and impact throughout the state of North Carolina. Key audiences have included partners and potential partners, funders and granting organizations, business and opinion leaders, elected officials and the general public statewide. A tremendous amount of successful foundational work has gone into developing a strong and rising brand reputation across the state and throughout the region.

So far, the majority of NC State’s national targeted brand awareness and reputation efforts have been driven through:

- An innovative and highly successful media relations strategy that places hundreds of NC State experts and tens of thousands of stories in top media outlets across the globe annually.
- Targeted peer-influencing efforts aimed at presidents/chancellors, provosts, vice chancellors for research and admissions deans at top universities nationwide.
- Active participation in and promotion through the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities and other higher-education organizations.
- Utilizing “free” airtime provided via NC State Athletics to promote the university’s academic messages during nationally televised sporting events.

Measuring the Impact

Visual and message brand consistency are at all-time highs at NC State. The university is often held up as an example among peers nationally as having an excellent, well-executed and consistent brand. Communications and marketing efforts across the university are more strategic, coordinated and effective than ever before.

NC State is recognized as a leading national research university with a brand and reputation that convey action, impact and excellence. University Communications and Marketing conducts marketplace surveys about every two years to measure changes in perception. Results show continual significant improvement in key audience understanding of and support for NC State.

Alumni, donor and statewide surveys show that NC State is now widely recognized across North Carolina and beyond as an outstanding university with high academic excellence, unparalleled research excellence and outreach that makes a difference in people's lives. Among alumni and donors, we've surpassed our peer competition in terms of perception of excellence in key indicators. For the statewide (nonaffiliated) public, we've surpassed out-of-state peers and have closed the gap to be seen as on par with the blue schools up the road (generally within 5 percentage points — some above, some below, depending on different ratings) in key ratings including academic excellence.

Quantitative and qualitative research further demonstrate that the university's recognition and reputation continue to rise and that brand-based communications efforts have resulted in many positive outcomes for NC State. These results show a huge leap forward over the last few years, further demonstrating that our efforts are working, and point to the potential benefits of significantly enhancing NC State's brand and reputation.

Our Current Situation

While NC State has built its brand value on generations of delivering economic, societal and intellectual prosperity, only within the last few years has the university focused on identifying, protecting and advancing its brand and reputation for the overall benefit of the institution and all its parts.

Due to the campus community's involvement in and dedication to building and advancing NC State's brand and reputation, we have made exceptional progress and many positive impacts over the last few years, particularly within the NC State family, across the state and throughout the region. As a result, the NC State community recognizes, more than ever before, the power and importance of brand and reputation in enabling the university to reach its remarkable potential and achieve aggressive, community-changing strategic goals.

The university community understands and values the potential benefits of establishing NC State as a strong national and international brand. However, for a number of reasons, the university has not had ample opportunity or ability to widely market the brand and reputation outside of the state of North Carolina. We've not previously been in a position to coordinate or execute national and international marketing strategies to educate key audiences across the country and around the globe about NC State's strengths, differentiators and excellence.

NC State's brand momentum and impact are just beginning to take hold. This task force believes that at this unique point in time, this university has the opportunity, and the need, to

greatly enhance the brand and reputation of NC State to help achieve strategic goals and elevate the university to unprecedented levels of success.

Challenges to Be Addressed

Although this task force chose to focus on finding solutions rather than dwelling on problems, we did identify several concrete challenges to overcome in the university's ability to significantly advance NC State's brand and reputation. Key challenges are outlined below.

- *Lack of national and international reputation.* While much progress has been made, there is a strong sense that NC State is not understood, recognized or rated anywhere near a level that reflects the true strength and excellence of this university. This is especially true outside of North Carolina. For example:
 - Faculty are not recognized at a level their accomplishments merit.
 - The university's rankings (national and international) do not accurately reflect the university's strengths.
 - The university has not been invited into the Association of American Universities, while universities with weaker profiles have been accepted.
- *Lack of recognition and appreciation of key differentiators.* Publics outside the state, and even within North Carolina and the university, do not recognize or value NC State for key differentiators and the unique benefits the university delivers. For example:
 - Centennial Campus is not yet widely recognized or appreciated.
 - NC State's entrepreneurship capabilities have not been widely acclaimed or understood.
 - The university's leadership in government and industry partnerships, and the benefits these relationships bring, are not broadly known.
 - NC State's world-leading research and innovation are not well recognized.
 - Our unique and valuable location is not appreciated.
- *Investment and allocation.* The task force notes a lack, or insufficient current allocation, of resources required to implement and sustain national and international brand and reputation marketing communication campaigns.
- *Decentralized structure.* University units and staff collaborate and coordinate much more effectively than ever before, which has brought many significant benefits across NC State. However, the university's historically decentralized organizational structure and decision-making requires improvement for the university to effectively utilize limited time and resources to significantly advance brand and reputation.
 - We need better systems allowing us to collaborate, share strategies and resources, and tell our stories more effectively.

- Because of current organizational alignment, it is difficult to share information and utilize shared data for decision-making.
- *Aversion to risk.* Traditionally, the university has often avoided taking big risks.
- *Not bold enough/too humble.* We've greatly improved over the last few years, but too many across our community remain hesitant to promote their own or the university's successes. It is time for NC State to be loud and proud about how excellent this university is and the amazing impacts we make across the state, nation and world.
- *Lack of focus.* We need to own up to what we are really good at — and not be afraid of it — rather than trying to be all things to all people/publics.
- *Lack of internal support for employees to advance the brand.* NC State's world-leading faculty and outstanding staff lack an understanding of how they can advance the university's brand and reputation, and they lack support enabling them to effectively do so.
 - Faculty often have no support for efforts such as preparations, publication support, conference posters, public speaking, board or committee meetings, etc. These activities present daily opportunities to advance the NC State brand to a broader audience.
 - Faculty and staff feel they need additional support to better understand and pursue collaborative brand opportunities with colleagues across the institution.
 - Faculty and staff desire better understanding of the brand and more opportunities to get personally involved with advancing NC State's reputation.
- *Limited number of out-of-state students.* An inherent challenge in advancing a national brand is North Carolina's 18% limit on out-of-state undergraduates. In our current situation, this challenge is further exacerbated by a decreasing number of domestic and international graduate students.
- *Competitors are not standing still.* In an increasingly competitive marketplace, NC State's peers and competitors are investing in their own brand, reputation and marketing communications efforts. Across higher education, the last few years have seen an enhanced focus on university marketing communications in terms of organizational structures and external expenditures.
- *Impacts of COVID-19.* Although the impacts of the global pandemic are not yet fully known, the task force acknowledges that this unprecedented experience will have lasting effects on higher education and will affect how NC State is able to elevate our brand and reputation.

- The task force stresses the importance of continually taking into consideration the impacts of COVID-19 related to university planning and operations.
- The committee recommends that we implement big-picture task force and strategic plan themes through tactics that can be adjusted to accommodate necessary changes caused by the pandemic while still advancing larger, critical goals.

Although these items are listed as challenges, the task force sees them as opportunities to greatly enhance NC State's brand and reputation. Steps toward achieving this end are highlighted below.

Recommended Themes

Following several meetings, discussions and exercises to determine strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, goals and strategies, task force members decided to focus recommendations around four overarching themes. The task force proposes the following themes for inclusion in the university's upcoming strategic plan. Note that there is purposefully and understandably an overlap in key objectives and tactics, as many efforts to advance NC State's brand and reputation cross multiple goals and themes.

Note also that task force members understand these objectives will certainly be adjusted and strengthened in coordination with themes, objectives and strategies from the other eight task forces to ultimately create the most effective university strategic plan.

Additionally, the task force acknowledges the critical need and importance of advancing diversity, equity and inclusion at NC State, and we strongly encourage that these critical goals be clearly infused in efforts to communicate about NC State's brand and reputation. We also strongly encourage the Strategic Planning Steering Committee to ensure that efforts to enhance diversity, equity and inclusion at NC State are strongly emphasized throughout the university's next 10-year strategic plan.

Theme 1: Make Brand and Reputation an NC State Priority

NC State has made great strides in advancing our brand and reputation throughout the current 10-year strategic plan. As outlined above, only within the last few years has the university identified its brand, instituted brand guidelines and standards, and focused on actively highlighting and promoting the broad excellence of the university.

Fortunately, these efforts have been successful in significantly elevating brand awareness and support within NC State's internal publics, alumni and donors, potential students and their parents, North Carolina business leaders and decision makers, and citizens across the state and beyond.

Even with this success, there remains insufficient knowledge of the strategic importance of NC State's branding efforts among internal constituents — who have the ability to be our strongest

advocates — and how they can be part of the solution to advance the university’s brand and reputation.

The university must find new ways to invest in this critical endeavor and build brand awareness and support. There remain substantial opportunities to be addressed, and extraordinary benefits to be realized, by aggressively and strategically advancing NC State’s brand and reputation regionally, nationally and internationally.

The university has made great progress through focused, strategic marketing communications efforts supported by collaboration across campus. However, significantly elevating NC State’s brand and reputation over the next 10 years will require a thoughtful and critical review of the importance the university gives to this goal, including analyzing resource allocations and organizational alignment. To achieve overall brand and reputation success, NC State must properly allocate and structure our resources to provide the best opportunity to achieve the goals and objectives identified in our next strategic plan.

We expect this task force and several others will identify strategic goals that will provide the university even more opportunities to strengthen our brand and reputation in the coming years. However, to achieve the desired results nationally and internationally, the university must commit to making the necessary financial and resource investments.

To accomplish this theme, we propose the following objectives:

- Establish and continuously promote an inclusive campuswide culture of teamwork, intentionality and awareness regarding our brand and reputation strategies and tactics.
- Determine and allocate the budget and resources necessary to achieve all brand and reputation goals identified in the forthcoming NC State 10-year strategic plan.
- Identify, recruit, hire and train the human resources necessary to achieve all brand and reputation goals identified in the forthcoming NC State 10-year strategic plan.
- Determine the appropriate organizational alignment and/or strategic oversight to enable NC State to most effectively use its limited resources to advance the brand and reputation of the university and help achieve the goals of the new strategic plan.

>> **Strategies and Tactics**

Objective: Establish and continuously promote an inclusive campuswide culture of teamwork, intentionality and awareness regarding our brand and reputation strategies and tactics.

- Launch a research-driven, highly collaborative brand refresh project.
 - Similar to the initial brand project launched in 2013, use the opportunity to educate and engage campus in understanding, developing and owning the updated brand.
 - Process can provide needed updates to brand drivers, personality traits and key messages, including infusing more diversity, equity and inclusion throughout the platform.

- o Can identify not only brand updates, but needs of campus partners to assist them in advancing the brand and reputation.
- Conduct campuswide brand and reputation survey(s) and focus group(s) among faculty, staff and students related to all elements of university brand and reputation.
- Establish an annual recognition and awards program for departments, colleges, units and individuals related to their brand and reputation achievements and scaled to their responsibilities, enabling everyone to contribute to our collective success.
- Identify areas where our current achievements are underrecognized nationally and internationally (low-hanging fruit), as well as areas in which we need to make improvements because our current performance is holding us back (e.g., international collaborations and journal citations).
 - o Create strategies to make progress in these key areas.
- Create and effectively disseminate brand training and information to all campus populations as a part of an onboarding/orientation process and at regular ongoing intervals.
 - Include a brand message at least annually in the chancellor’s communication(s).
 - Establish, approve and enforce university brand policies, rules and regulations.
- Create accessible and user-friendly brand and reputation toolkits, talking points and templates for use by faculty and staff for all external-facing content (multimedia, environmental, research, IP, etc.).
- Establish a “Brand Ambassadors” program for faculty, alumni and students.
 - Cultivate a network of engaged campus stakeholders to highlight NC State’s brand and reputation across mediums.
 - Name more campus assets (scholarships, programs, etc.) after high-profile alumni and faculty.
- Establish an office dedicated to supporting faculty and staff efforts to promote the brand and reputation of NC State.
 - This office would have the focus, capacity and funding to help faculty and staff with a wide range of branding opportunities, such as assistance with presentation and poster design, media relations support and helping with remarks and marketing promotion.
 - Currently, faculty and staff who need this kind of help are left to rely on overburdened campus communicators who might not have the requisite time or expertise, or to hire central communications, who also might not have the time.

Objective: Determine and allocate the budget and resources necessary to achieve all brand and reputation goals identified in the forthcoming NC State 10-year strategic plan.

- Plan and fund an ongoing national brand promotional strategy and an international brand promotional strategy (*see theme 3 below*).
- Identify aspirational and peer benchmark institutions related to university brand and reputation.
 - Gather information related to budget, staffing, organizational alignment and strategy successes from benchmark institutions.
 - Achieve, at minimum, the average annual budget and staffing of our selected benchmarks by 2025.
- Ensure UComm will be included in all university marketing and communications budgeting decisions.
- Establish goals for national and international ranking metrics (*see theme 4 below*).
 - Gather marketing expenditure data for comparably ranked institutions.
 - Allocate national and international marketing budget in line with comparably ranked institutions.
 - Advise faculty and staff how they can promote our brand nationally and internationally in the course of their regular activities.

Objective: Identify, recruit, hire and train the human resources necessary to achieve all brand and reputation goals identified in the forthcoming NC State 10-year strategic plan.

- Create an effective hybrid university marketing and communications staffing model.
 - Ensure UComm will review and approve all university marketing and communications job descriptions.
 - Ensure UComm will be represented in all senior-level university marketing and communications hiring decisions.
- Evaluate and implement at the right level a marketing and communications support center.
 - This structure would create funded, advanced expertise available to help colleges and units achieve goals.
 - Examples include SEO and search expertise, marketing and PR planning, advertising purchase and placement, social media, video and photography.
 - Units would come to the center with goals, and experts would drive funded marketing communications efforts to achieve those goals.
- Establish an annual recognition and awards program for universitywide marketing and communications staff related to their brand and reputation achievements.
- Identify aspirational and peer benchmarks related to university brand and reputation.
 - Gather salary information from benchmark institutions.

Objective: Determine the appropriate organizational alignment and/or strategic oversight to enable NC State to most effectively use its limited resources to advance the brand and reputation of the university and help achieve the goals of the new strategic plan.

- Engage leadership and communicators across campus to determine marketing and communications goals. Advance a unified marketing communications strategy for NC State, its colleges and its units.
- Audit and evaluate existing communications structures, resources, strategies and effectiveness/impacts across campus.
- Conduct best-practice review of aspirational peer institutions to learn about optimal organizational alignment, strategy and collaboration.
- Identify areas of excellence, overlap, redundancy, poor impact and need.
- Work with campus partners to determine a strategic organizational alignment and resource model that most effectively advances the university's brand and reputation benefiting all colleges and units.
- Implement appropriate and beneficial marketing communications policies, procedures and rules related to the brand.
- Transition, over time, to a more effective and efficient organizational and process structure to best serve the university and advance its brand and reputation.

Theme 2: Build and Promote a National and International Brand Reputation

Arising from efforts to make brand and reputation a priority at NC State, what emerged as the task force's strongest desire (reflecting similar feedback from the broader campus community) is to build and promote a national and international brand reputation.

Many internal stakeholders feel NC State does not do enough to highlight our accomplishments. The sense of pride expressed externally is perceived to be underwhelming, and there's a consistent feeling among some that our many achievements and accomplishments do not receive the national or international recognition they merit. As a result, there is a feeling among NC State faculty, staff and students that NC State is not recognized at nearly the level that matches our excellence — especially outside North Carolina.

In order to address these challenges and accomplish this theme, storytelling and content focus must be a main objective. In short, we must find every strategic and effective opportunity to tell the NC State brand story in meaningful and influential ways to our targeted publics.

As we build on the successful efforts of the last few years, to elevate our focus and ability to tell our story by strategically and widely promoting the broad excellence of NC State and its faculty, research, students, alumni and successes, we must improve internal communication and brand support, and persistently and widely promote our university's strengths and differentiators, such as Centennial Campus, our partnerships and the impact we make on the world around us.

Additionally, the task force believes that an enhanced focus on and commitment to improving and promoting areas of excellence and research impact will provide content for elevating a national and international reputation of distinction. Finally, as highlighted in theme 1, we must invest in consistent national and international brand and reputation campaigns to most effectively communicate the NC State story.

The audiences for these stories are many — including current faculty, staff and students, alumni, potential students, partners and potential partners, donors, funders, the broader public within the state, peers, business and thought leaders, elected officials and the broader national and international community.

As we seek stories and distribution strategies that impactfully highlight who we are as a university, we must focus on the “do” part of Think and Do. At NC State, we take ideas and turn them into something practical, useful, beneficial and often life-changing. Let's continue to share what has NC State done — and all we will do in the future.

To accomplish this theme, we propose the following objectives:

- Create an enhanced storytelling and content focus promoting key areas of excellence and differentiation to obtain acknowledgement as a national leader in these areas.
- Implement a third-party endorsement storytelling and content strategy.
- Launch and sustain a national brand marketing strategy.
- Launch and sustain an international brand marketing strategy.
- Implement a location-based thought leadership strategy to attract peers, thought leaders and influencers to experience campus.
- Launch effort to identify and achieve key university rankings (including top 150 internationally and top 50 in *U.S. News*).

>> Strategies and Tactics

Objective: Create an enhanced storytelling and content focus promoting key areas of excellence and differentiation to obtain acknowledgement as a national leader in these areas.

- Survey campus leaders (including faculty and staff leaders) to take an internal assessment of our true strengths as a university that we want to promote globally.
- Find a range of stories — not just STEM and agriculture, but sports, employability of our students, etc., with an emphasis on diversity and inclusion.
 - Generate stories that tie into our focus on excellence in research, teaching/academics, athletics, innovation and entrepreneurship,

partnerships/Centennial Campus/corporate engagement and our contributions to North Carolina's economy.

- Identify stories in the intersection of the above-mentioned areas of excellence (e.g., the relationship between the Wilson College of Textiles and Adidas and how the Athletics Department helped establish the partnership).
- Beyond story ideas, create in-depth toolkits that colleges, departments, faculty, staff and students can use to promote these key areas.
 - This could include comprehensive content, photos, videos, PowerPoints, social media posts, remarks for presentations and speeches, email templates, etc., that campus constituents can use to advance the brand through their normal work efforts.
 - Make it easy for campus constituents to tell the brand and reputation stories through their daily efforts.
- Pursue comprehensive content creation and promotion of the following key strengths and differentiators:
 - Centennial Campus.
 - Industry and government partnerships.
 - Entrepreneurship.
 - Alumni success.
 - Graduates getting, and creating, good jobs.
 - Location.
 - Research and innovation excellence.

Objective: Elevate and leverage stakeholders to elevate the NC State brand and reputation; recruit third-party endorsement in telling the NC State story.

- Work with Centennial Campus partners to promote their testimonials highlighting the success they've had because of NC State.
- Collaborate with RTP and other area partners to produce and promote content highlighting their connections with NC State and their successes because of the university.
- Work with the Office of Economic Development to identify and work with businesses who have located to North Carolina because of NC State, to tell their stories promoting the university.
 - All of the above can be overlapped with alumni storytelling.
- Partner with Duke, UNC-Chapel Hill and leading industry partners to tell stories of collaboration and combined impact.
 - Utilize other strong brands and their work with NC State to elevate our brand as well.

Objective: Launch and maintain a national brand marketing strategy.

- A critical part of elevating the brand is to greatly expand brand awareness outside of traditionally targeted in-state, North Carolina markets.

- This can be accomplished through an ongoing brand marketing strategy that incorporates a variety of paid campaigns and marketing channels aimed at key publics.
- This strategy should be approached in two broad categories: overall general brand awareness throughout the country, and key market brand strategies in targeted areas of interest and impact for NC State.
- Conduct best-practice research.
- Increase general brand awareness.
 - Utilize Athletics exposure — television, radio and digital.
 - Look for remnant and other advertising opportunities.
 - Pursue broad digital and social media strategies.
- Determine targeted markets.
 - Identify key markets of influence.
 - Example: Combination of alumni and donor populations, peer and thought leader institutions, funding institutions, potential impressions.
 - Identify target audiences.
 - Example: Peers, alumni and donors, thought leaders, prospective students, agencies/funders, partners and potential partners, leaders in targeted disciplines.
 - Identify outlets and develop a comprehensive marketing communications plan.
 - Commit to pre- and post-measure of awareness and impact.
- Coordinate with peer strategy (see theme 4 below).

Objective: Launch and maintain an international marketing strategy.

- A key effort in elevating the brand is to expand brand awareness outside of the United States.
- Formulate an ongoing strategy that incorporates a variety of paid campaigns and marketing channels aimed at key publics. This strategy will likely primarily be accomplished through directing marketing communications efforts in targeted areas of key interest and impact for NC State.
- Work with appropriate campus partners to identify key markets, needs and opportunities.
- Conduct best-practice research.
- Identify key markets of influence.
 - Example: Combination of alumni and donor populations, peer and thought leader institutions, admissions targets, visibility potential.
- Identify target audiences.
 - Example: Peers, alumni and donors, thought leaders, prospective students, agencies/funders, partners and potential partners, leaders in targeted disciplines.
- Identify outlets and develop a comprehensive marketing communications plan.
 - Commit to pre- and post-measure of awareness and impact.
- Coordinate with peer strategy (see theme 4 below).

Objective: Implement a location-based thought leadership strategy to attract peers, thought leaders and influencers to experience campus and promote NC State.

- Experience has shown that once peers, influencers and thought leaders visit and experience the university, they become fans and supporters.
- Create plan to host several thought-leadership meetings annually on Centennial Campus, focused on targeted areas of strength to pursue for national reputation leadership.
 - Pull together top thinkers and influencers, and highlight NC State's strengths in the area and beyond.
 - Promote NC State's expertise while getting influencers on campus.
- Launch a speaker series that brings high-level speakers and exposure to NC State.
 - Engage speakers in opportunities for engagement with faculty and students.
- As Centennial Campus expands, plan space for additional conferences and larger meetings that can attract thought leaders and influencers.
- Actively pursue hosting academic conferences on Centennial Campus that would elevate awareness of NC State's campus and strengths.
 - Identify key organizations and conferences, and prioritize.

Objective: Launch effort to identify and achieve key university rankings (see theme 4 below).

- Coordinate storytelling, marketing and additional reputation efforts with peer influencing efforts.

Theme 3: Invest in and Promote Key Areas of Excellence, Impact and Reputation — Now and in the Future

In order to advance NC State's brand and promote its reputation, we must play to the university's strengths. This involves identifying — and capitalizing upon — key areas of excellence. Taking note of our core strengths, we'll devote attention and resources to developing and enhancing them, leveraging the spheres we excel in for maximum impact.

Showcasing our excellence requires effective storytelling (see above) that gives targeted audiences a window into our greatest achievements. By strategically and broadly sharing the narratives that illustrate our success in these key areas, we'll engage various audiences — locally, nationally and internationally — to take note of and understand NC State's excellence.

To more effectively capitalize on our successes, we must provide mechanisms that reduce weaknesses and shortcomings in these identified key areas, including additional investment in human and technical resources and removing institutional impediments to success.

Additionally, enhancing these key areas of excellence must be conducted with an eye toward expanding opportunities such as cluster hires, key initiatives and campus centers. Implementing

such opportunities unleashes impactful communication of the results derived from focused investment in these priority areas.

As the world continues to change, we are committed to keeping in step, and we want to highlight how NC State responds to — and provides solutions for — the world's greatest problems.

To accomplish this theme, we propose the following objectives:

- Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of our colleges, partnerships and initiatives to measure and identify our greatest strengths from multiple angles.
- Enhance our key areas of excellence and achievement through focused investment and expanded opportunities and by actively identifying and removing barriers to future achievement.
- Pave the way for future success in these key areas of excellence by making necessary adjustments in light of global changes.
- Promote our reputation of excellence in these areas among various stakeholders through narratives and campaigns illustrating our successes and continual growth.

>> Strategies and Tactics

Objective: Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of our colleges, partnerships and initiatives to measure and identify our greatest strengths from multiple angles.

- Evaluate our most successful centers and collegiate initiatives, noting their common characteristics, determining how cross-disciplinary participation has furthered their success and considering the level of student, public and industry involvement.
- Assess cluster hires, taking note of which parameters (e.g., funding, co-location, interdisciplinarity, willingness to collaborate, etc.) have made those hires more or less successful.
- Survey each dean about which characteristics they see in their top two programs that represent key strengths in their college.
- Looking at standard national and international metrics, identify which strengths are being measured and how NC State fares in comparison to other universities.
- Identify which strengths are apparent from scholarly work, patent licenses and technologies licensed by the ORC.
- Identify which strengths are apparent to our key campus partnerships.
 - Identify which strengths are apparent from partners' investment in research support, collaborations and consequent philanthropy.
 - Survey industry partners about what they value most about their interactions with NC State.

Objective: Enhance our key areas of excellence and achievement through focused investment and expanded opportunities and by actively identifying and removing barriers to future

achievement.

- Continually promote and expand opportunities for open communication and collaborative efforts between all individuals across campus.
- Remove structural inhibitions to success by eliminating departmental boundaries in professional activities and by expanding opportunities and rewards for interdisciplinary programs, especially for young faculty.
- Actively recruit and retain outstanding faculty and add additional cluster hires.
- Multiply opportunities for key initiatives and campus centers.
- Reinvent the organizational structure over the long term to ensure each faculty member contributes their unique skills (e.g., research, outreach and extension, entrepreneurship, clinical practice, mentorship, etc.).
- Evaluate whether focused investment in these key areas produces a return on investment.

Objective: Pave the way for future success in these key areas of excellence by making necessary adjustments in light of global changes.

- Determine the primary social, economic, environmental and medical issues society will face in the next 20 years, and determine how effectively and quickly NC State can respond to these issues.
- Identify who NC State's primary stakeholders will be in the next 20 years and determine whether the current university model will remain relevant.
- Consider the future of virtual education and how to improve our education and research structures.
- Evaluate metrics in the RPT process that have become obsolete over time and make necessary adjustments.
- Consider how federal and state funding for research is changing, and adapt to ensure our work is sustainable.

Objective: Promote our reputation of excellence in these areas among various stakeholders through narratives and campaigns illustrating our successes and continual growth.

- Develop multiple ways to convey our success in teaching, research and outreach in these key areas of excellence.
- Train faculty members, alumni, administrators and outreach and extension members to tell their stories effectively.
- Illustrate how we Think and Do in these key areas with a variety of narratives and diverse voices, ensuring we engage our various audiences and stakeholders.
- Build narratives around younger faculty members and star-quality hires to demonstrate how they are part of the university's future.
- Work with UComm to develop and distribute these narratives.
- Confirm that our stories are being heard on local, national and international levels through ongoing media monitoring.

- Create a dedicated Office of Research Communications to most effectively and strategically coordinate and promote these key brand stories. Leading research universities have realized significant benefits from such offices.

Theme 4: Improve Peer Influencing, Memberships and Rankings

While advancing the brand and reputation of NC State is a critical internal strategy, the primary goal of this theme is to develop a strategy that enhances the external perception of NC State across national and international forums.

NC State is a long-established land-grant public university with a traditionally strong reputation in training students for, and leading research in, agriculture and engineering. We've grown to be a leading public research university that excels across disciplines. NC State is a powerhouse in science, technology, engineering and math. We lead in agriculture, education, textiles, business and natural resources. We're at the forefront of teaching and research in design, the humanities and the social sciences. We're nationally recognized as a leader in entrepreneurship. And we're home to one of the world's best colleges of veterinary medicine.

Historically, our main goal has been to serve the state of North Carolina and the local communities within the state. Over the past 100 years, the impact of NC State has expanded significantly. We've established a global presence by helping brilliant minds become productive citizens who develop solutions for problems affecting people all over the world. Still, the perception of NC State has remained focused on the local and regional level.

NC State is often ranked alongside similar institutions, including Georgia Tech, Penn State, Purdue and Virginia Tech — but falls behind these institutions in establishing a global presence. Much of this can be attributed to our participation in the UNC System and the reality that North Carolina provides significantly more state support for public four-year institutions. Consequently, nearly 85% of our students are in-state students, while the other four institutions attract significantly more out-of-state students — and Georgia Tech and Purdue, in particular, draw a large number of international students. Additionally, NC State ranks significantly lower in faculty compensation compared to its peers.

Though these realities naturally hinder a strong global presence, other avenues exist for improving our national and international perception through improving peer influencing, prestigious memberships and rankings.

To accomplish this theme, we propose the following objectives:

- Research, invest in and implement an ongoing strategic approach to achieve an international ranking of 150 or lower within 10 years according to QS, THE and/or ARWU.
- Research, invest in and implement an ongoing strategy to achieve recognition as a top 50 university — and top 25 public university — in *U.S. News & World Report* rankings.

- Implement a strategy to become a member of the AAU (Association of American Universities) within 10 years.
- Create a plan for incrementally and significantly improving the rankings for each college at NC State, and improving each departmental ranking in their topical areas.
- Improve industry-academic collaboration and entrepreneurship rankings.
- Launch and support a coordinated, campuswide peer-influencer program.
- Assign an internal team to identify, on an annual basis, key rankings of interest, and to accurately and effectively complete corresponding surveys/submissions.

>> Strategies and Tactics

Objectives: Research, invest in and implement an ongoing strategic approach to achieve an international ranking of 150 or lower within ten years according to QS, THE and/or ARWU. Research, invest in and implement an ongoing strategy to achieve recognition as a top 50 university — and top 25 public university — in *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. Implement a plan to become a member of the AAU (Association of American Universities) within 10 years. Create a strategy for incrementally and significantly improving the rankings for each college at NC State, and improving each departmental ranking in their topical areas. Improve industry-academic collaboration and entrepreneurship rankings.

Task force members believe the strategies and tactics outlined below will play a critical role in achieving all the objectives listed above.

- Identify key strategic locations and establish a physical NC State presence in additional continents (Asia, Africa, South America) in addition to the Prague European Center.
- Enhance strategies and efforts to continually build strong and strategic global university partnerships for impactful research, education and international development.
- Because citation impact is a key statistic for global university rankings, implement strategies to significantly increase faculty international joint publications — these publications can more than double the average citations of domestic co-authors' publications (13.3 vs. 7.2 in average citations).
- Bring in high-level speakers — including Nobel Prize winners, chancellors, federal-level personnel, and other renowned thinkers — to campus under a Distinguished Lecture Series (*see theme 3 above*).
- Increase internal championing and support for nominating faculty to prestigious awards like NAS/NAE, fellowships of organizations, major national and international awards, etc.
- Increase the presence of industry partners on campus, and name appropriate programs after some of our key partners.
- Improve alumni relations specifically for graduate alumni.
 - While alumni efforts tend to focus on undergraduate alumni, graduate alumni tend to have more success, impact and global presence and can thus increase the external perception of NC State nationally and internationally.
- Significantly increase diversity on campus to represent a potentially wide cross-section of people bringing in new thoughts and ideas for the future.

- Increase financial resources by implementing campaigns through University Advancement to improve alumni and donor participation nationally and internationally.
- Reduce dependence on state funding for faculty compensation, and increase faculty salaries to retain and recruit top faculty members.
- Spend resources to connect the two campuses across Western Boulevard more seamlessly, enhancing NC State's presence.
- Continually invest in support systems for obtaining research grants and awards to elevate NC State's research awards, expenditures and impact.
- Implement objectives and strategies in the previous three themes to broadly elevate awareness of NC State's excellence.

Objective: Launch and support a coordinated, campuswide peer-influencer program.

- Research best practices and effective strategies of peer institutions that have been successful in vastly improving peer ratings and rankings.
- Audit existing central and college peer-influencer efforts across NC State and determine their effectiveness.
- Create a structure to strategically coordinate efforts for maximum efficiency and effectiveness.
 - Create a database of administration, dean and faculty leadership positions and/or membership on external boards and commissions, higher-education / academic organization committees, and other prestigious organizations.
 - Create a database of when these leaders are giving presentations or talks, or participating in other activities demonstrating their expertise.
 - Provide marketing support to utilize these positions and opportunities to promote the individuals and NC State's expertise.
- Provide coordination support to manage an effective peer-influencing marketing strategy.

Objective: Develop an internal committee to advance NC State's successful participation in strategically improving significant rankings.

- Team would be made up of a core group that should include staff from the Provost's Office, Research, Institutional Research and Planning, OIED and UComm (and others, as appropriate).
- Committee would be responsible for working with university leadership to identify key rankings of significance for the university on an annual basis.
- Committee would be empowered to work with all necessary units across campus to most effectively complete all related surveys and submissions to ensure NC State puts its best foot forward.
 - Data experts, content experts, communications experts, etc., can all play a valuable role in providing the highest-quality submissions.
- Committee would be charged with engaging with campus partners to determine recommendations to leadership for improving key rankings.

Appendix A

Task Force Membership Roster

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