Hispanic Advertising and Higher Education: Using Advertising to Encourage Hispanic Enrollment at WOU

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Hispanic Advertising and Higher Education

Using Advertising to Encourage Hispanic Enrollment at WOU

By
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An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation from the Western Oregon University Honors Program

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This very delayed thesis could not have been accomplished with the unwavering support of my academic mentors Gavin Keulks and Dave McDonald. Their patience and understanding through this process have been a primary reason I have been able to finally accomplish this milestone.

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**Table of Contents**

Abstract........................................................................................................................................3

Prologue.......................................................................................................................................4

Personal Connection.....................................................................................................................5

Higher Education Advantages.....................................................................................................6

Trends and Traditional Barriers....................................................................................................7

Advertising as a Tool....................................................................................................................18

WOU Efforts to Increase
Underserved Population Enrollment.........................................................................................23

  WOU Targeting Hispanics 2011.................................................................................................33

  WOU Spirit Campaign...............................................................................................................44

Social Climate................................................................................................................................47

Western Oregon University Advertising
Targeting Hispanic Population Specifically: 2018.....................................................................54

Mock Advertising Campaign.......................................................................................................56
Abstract

Advertising is a powerful tool meant to sway a consumer’s decision to use a product or a service. Typically, this is regarded as negative, but I propose using this tool to encourage aspirations of higher education among currently underrepresented youth with the goal of encouraging undergraduate enrollment at WOU. This thesis examines the current state of higher education among this group and the challenges they face. It also looks at how WOU has historically targeted this demographic and dedicated its services to their success. Lastly, it explores advertising theory in the higher education space and in order to create a custom Mock Campaign for Western Oregon University’s potential use.
Prologue

I began my journey into higher education during the fall of 2007. As I reflect on the years it has taken me to finish my thesis, I realize I am not just finishing for myself, but also for all those who believed in, helped, and guided me along the way. Without their encouragement, starting, let alone finishing, would have been impossible. The problem has not been laziness, but rather preoccupation. While I have not completed my degree, I have been working toward my future career goals at every opportunity, and in doing so, have been fortunate enough to achieve a job within my field of study. However, the ambition and tenacity that have benefitted my career endeavors are the same qualities I must fight against to accomplish this final task. It is hard to think ahead when coming from a community that teaches that which is tangible, is what is most important.

Achieving the immediate and grasping opportunities as they present themselves has been my focus thus far. Yes, the degree is important, but I must make sure I have income to pay my bills. Yes, I need my degree for a better future, but opportunities present themselves and survival will not let me pass them up. Even so, every day I wake up keenly aware that while I may be succeeding now, my long-term socioeconomic success depends on this degree that I have yet to complete. I also realize that this accomplishment is not just for me, but for those like me that have to overcome becoming sidetracked by life and circumstance, and must learn to look to the future rather than the immediate. This is for all of the students that share and can benefit from my story.
Personal Connection

This thesis examines increasing Hispanic enrollment at Western Oregon University through advertising efforts. This type of campaign is designed to target students exactly like me: first generation, low-income students who lack a higher education precedent in their lives. These are the students that traditionally do not seek college as an option. I grew up in a Hispanic household in a predominantly Hispanic community in Los Angeles, California. I am the third child, but the first to graduate high school and first to go to University. I was largely encouraged to value school and education by my family because of my aptitude and a self-driven desire to be successful. As I grew older, my drive grew stronger, but I noticed this was not the same for many of my friends. After moving to Oregon, I noticed that in my college-level classes, I was the only Hispanic student.

This lack of college focus within my community became very apparent during my first job. As an intern with a local youth program, my goal was to help disadvantaged youth graduate from high school, with hopes of directing them towards college. Unfortunately, many kids left the program after graduating high school and only some decided to enroll in a Community College or University. Within a few years, many of them dropped out. This phenomenon is replicated nationally among many disadvantaged communities. My thesis aims to address these trends at Western Oregon University. I chose to examine this issue using the tool of advertising, because it is designed to change perception and influence attitudes. Advertising is usually thought of as an instrument to sell products and/or services. However, I believe that it can be a powerful tool to change prevailing defeatist
attitudes and overcome the objections that prove obstacles to higher education for students like me.

*Higher Education Advantages*

Higher education is an important tool for achieving socioeconomic success. Countless studies have shown a positive correlation between higher education and quality of life. A well-documented benefit of higher education is a greater annual income. The Georgetown Center on Education and The Workforce found that college graduates earn twice as much on average as those who just have a high school diploma over the course of their lifetime. More than ever before, a lack of higher education attainment correlates to a lower household income level (Fry). These conclusions are supported by 2016 census information showing the median weekly earnings for a worker with a high school education at $692, versus $1,156 for those with a bachelor’s degree (Unemployment Rates and Earnings by Educational Attainment). As recently as 2013, households in which the primary breadwinner had at least a bachelor's degree accounted for only about a third of all United States homes, yet accounted for almost half of the combined United States household income (Fry).

Households with graduates also experience more job security, even in volatile job markets (Burciaga and Zarate, 25). Census Bureau findings show the unemployment rate in 2016 among those with a bachelor’s degree at 2.7%, almost half of what the
unemployment rate was for those with only a high school diploma at 5.2% (Unemployment Rates and Earnings by Educational Attainment). As we can see, higher education greatly benefits the recipient and provides an important social safety net when it comes to job security.

Apart from the direct financial benefits, there are many indirect social and quality of life benefits associated with higher education. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, 78% of college-educated women who married between 2006 and 2010 could expect their marriage to last at least 20 years. However, only 40% of women with a high school education or less, could expect the same success (Wang). This correlation between education and longer marriages extends to men as well, as those with higher levels of education are more likely to get married and stay married, than men with a lower education level. One study determined that 65% of men with bachelor's degrees could expect their marriage to last at least 20 years (Burciaga and Zarate, 25). One contributing factor to these statistics could be the tendency of college-educated adults to marry later in life, when they are often more financially stable, than adults who are less educated (Wang).

Furthermore, many jobs accessible to college graduates provide employee healthcare benefits. Proper healthcare aids in a better quality of life for both the employee and their dependents. In addition to physical health, developmental health benefits have been noted. Studies show that children of college-educated parents exhibit higher cognitive skills and school participation than those from lower educated families. They
also participate in extracurricular activities at a higher level when compared to those whose parents did not attend college (R. G. Gonzales, Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students 14). These benefits can be attributed to the foundation that college educated parents are often able to provide, one that includes proper healthcare and financial well-being that set a powerful precedent and strong support system benefiting the family structure and children within it.

The benefits individuals and their immediate family incur from higher educational attainment can be considered a private good. However, in this instance, the private good contributes to the overall public good. Society benefits in many ways by having a more educated population that is able to contribute economically at a greater rate (Daniel, Kanwar and Uvalić-Trumbić, 2). Apart from economic benefits, society benefits as those with degrees tend to be more engaged civically and invested in making their communities at large a better place if only for the fact they often have more time to take on these social responsibilities where their counterparts might not have the flexibility.

The benefits of higher education are many, for the individual as well as the community at large. As a society we must place emphasis on encouraging all who are able to pursue education to its fullest. Currently, it seems we have some work to do. According to the Bureau of Labor & Statistics, there is a deficit of educated workers in the United States and it is growing larger as time passes (R. G. Gonzales, Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students). A study conducted in 2010 validated these findings and estimated that there will be one million fewer college graduates by 2025 than
will be needed in the workforce (Perez, 21). A leading factor for this is thought to be the increasing cost of education. Despite the cause, in order to fill this deficit, the U.S will either have to import college-educated workers, or increase domestic graduation rates. Oregon’s Latino population has grown 72% since 2000 and the median age for Latinos is 24 years old (The Oregon Community Foundation, 2). As a fast growing, and young, segment of the population, Hispanics provide the United States the most opportunity to make up this deficit without relying on importing workers. Increasing the graduation rates of underrepresented groups (Hispanics and African Americans for example) to that of the non-Hispanic population requires investment, but that investment is returned in the form of higher tax contributions and less dependence on social programs among members of these groups (R. G. Gonzales, Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students, 14). Increasing the education of the native population, a growing percentage of which is Hispanic, provides the most social benefit overall. It is important to use as many tools as necessary to encourage the advancement of this segment. To that end, the tool I propose utilizing in order to reach this population and increase participation, is advertising.

**Trends and Traditional Barriers**

There was a time when a high school diploma translated to economic opportunity, but today, the ability to successfully compete in the labor market is college degree dependent (R. G. Gonzales, Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students, 14).
Students, 13). Society consistently reinforces the importance of higher education. Consequently, college is amongst the highest priority for students looking to achieve socioeconomic success. Unfortunately, there are many barriers that place higher education out of reach for underrepresented youth.

Although negative trends have started to diminish with time, and progress seems more apparent, there is still much work to do to continue to level the educational playing field. From 2000-2016 the national high school dropout percentage fell from 32% to 10% among 18-24 year old Hispanics (Gramlich). Despite this progress, these rates still remain highest among Black, Hispanic, and Asian youth, oftentimes nearly doubling the rates of their white counterparts. In Oregon specifically, in the 2015-16 school year 69% of Latino students received a high school diploma or GED, while white students completed their schooling at a rate of 77% (Oregon Department of Education, 1). Though only a few points behind, the disparity is still present and that still means 39% of Hispanic students have left school without receiving any sort of diploma.

In recent years, there has been a large shift in representation of Hispanics at the college level, with these students representing the largest minority group on campuses across the United States. In 2016, 47% of Hispanic high school graduates enrolled in college (Gramlich). Despite this progress, these students still fall behind in degree attainment, with only 22% earning an Associate’s degree or higher, compared to a 39% overall nationwide average (Excelencia in Education, 2). In Oregon, the disparity is slightly higher with 21% of Hispanics achieving at least an Associate’s degree, compared to 41% for the
general statewide population. Additionally, many students tend to enroll part time or do not attend a four-year institution, interestingly at a higher rate than other ethnic groups (D. A. Santiago, VOCES: A Profile of Today’s Latino College Students, 5). While progress is notable, we still need to continue to focus on facilitating higher education attainment for this population.

One of the main challenges to overcome when encouraging Hispanics to pursue higher education is affordability. According to a Pew Research Center Survey, Hispanics ranked education, the economy, and healthcare as top concerns for them as we headed into the 2016 election (Krogstad). This shines light on the values of the demographic group and the factors weighed when making decisions.

Affordability translates to opportunity, and even if a desire to attend college exists, the large economic investment necessary to do so can often make it seem unattainable. Latinos that do attend are more likely to enroll part-time and work while going to school (Camacho Liu, 7). This creates a dynamic where students must continually juggle their aspirations with their immediate needs, and many times the immediacy of needing income wins.

As costs rise, a college education has become much harder to attain for many working class families. A 2017 survey of students and parents conducted by the Sallie Mae Corporation, noted that of the “first-in-family” segment of college attendants, a large proportion of which is Hispanic, came from lower income families, and did not make the decision to pursue higher education until high school (Sallie Mae, 7, 35). This shorter
planning window severely limits the savings funds available to draw from for tuition. Students who wish to attend must often choose between limiting their college choices, and incurring debt, which can seem hard to justify when feeling the pressure to contribute financially to their family (Burciaga and Zarate, 27).

In 2012, "33% of Hispanic families with children under 18 lived below the poverty line," which computes to an annual income below $40,000 (Santiago, Calderon Galdeano and Taylor, 4). The choice many students make is to simply not attend and obtain employment. Due to these income considerations, 66% of Hispanics who got a job or entered the military directly after high school cited the need to help support their family as a reason for not enrolling in college (Krogstad). The difficulty of this decision is compounded when one has dependents of their own, considering that "more than any other undergraduate group, Latino students tend to be independent with dependents" (D. A. Santiago, VOCES: A Profile of Today's Latino College Students, 4). Unfortunately, the economic burden is a huge hurdle in Hispanics’ choice to pursue higher education.

Just being an undocumented student itself carries with it additional hurdles. Lack of access to financial aid or affordable tuition can make it very difficult for these students to achieve higher education (Burciaga and Zarate, 28). Around 17% of Latino public school students are immigrants (Perez, 21). Estimates put the undocumented high school graduation rate between 5%-10% (R. G. Gonzales, Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students, 21). Knowing who to trust with this private information that can make one vulnerable in the political climate can be as much of a
Some effective strategies for encouraging higher education and tackling expenses among Latino students are available. Community colleges (two years or less), offer the flexibility and affordability to overcome issues of accessibility and enroll 58% of the total Latino students currently in college and actually reflect a considerable shrink in the achievement gap; Here Latino students either meet or exceed peer graduation rates of other ethnic groups (Camacho Liu, 5). In addition to community colleges, state schools like Western Oregon University, offer a more affordable approach towards achieving a degree, as in-state tuition helps alleviate the financial burden of college (Hobsons, 17). The concern about affordability is one we must address as a society in order advance higher education attainment for underrepresented populations in particular. Programs like DACA and In-State Tuition ensure those who are able to pursue education can do so without risk of stigma or safety.

Additional economic barriers exist for the Hispanic community in the form of weak institutional support. Research has found that schools with a disproportionately high number of Latino and African American students are more likely to have less prepared teachers, fewer supplies, and larger class sizes, which can correlate to decreased opportunity for achieving college readiness (Burciaga and Zarate, 26). This lends support the 2015 United States Census results, which reported that Hispanics had the lowest percentage of educational attainment at all levels of education, high school through advanced degrees (United States Census Bureau, 3).
60% of the Hispanic students enrolled in college were women (D. A. Santiago, VOCES: A Profile of Today's Latino College Students, 4). This disparity can be attributed to the findings that Hispanic males often experience more difficulty at all levels of school, including higher suspension and bullying rates, and a greater likelihood of being diagnosed with a learning disability than female or white students (Burciaga and Zarate, 27). Such social impediments can inhibit achievement and goal setting, and potentially account for higher dropout rates. Latinas often engage more in school & extracurricular activities. This involvement has been found to lead to higher rates of college enrollment and preparation (Burciaga and Zarate, 27). While it is great that females are capitalizing on education, this gender discrepancy should be addressed and steps should be taken to increase Hispanic male graduation rates as well.

National demographic shift should also be noted. In the 2000’s, the sources of Hispanic population increase shifted, with US births accounting for more growth than immigration (Flores). In Oregon 64% of Latinos are US-Born (The Oregon Community Foundation, 2). The implication here is that many Latinos live in mixed status families. Uncertainty about their own or their family’s legal status can create insecurity and stress, possibly negatively affecting scholastic participation for many students.

Closely linked to external social pressures, are internalized psychological impediments. Latino students are more likely to value higher education than any other ethnic group, yet their aspirations are lower than others (D. A. Santiago, CHOOSING Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs): A Closer Look at Latino Students' College Choices, 4).
A lack of motivation can decrease incentive to challenge oneself. A Pew Research Center study found that Hispanics at “all preparation levels” tend to enroll in less selective institutions than their white counterparts (D. A. Santiago, CHOOSING Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs): A Closer Look at Latino Students' College Choices , 4). Latinos are less likely to take college prep courses or know how access financial aid opportunities than white students, who are statistically more likely to attend college (Burciaga and Zarate , 25). They also attend fewer college campus tours, cost often being a main factor in this decision (Hobsons , 49). Consequently, Latino undergraduates tend to be less prepared than other ethnic groups for college coursework (D. A. Santiago, VOCES: A Profile of Today's Latino College Students , 4).

"Nearly 60% of the lowest income students, across all ethnicities, report that neither parent earned a four-year degree" (Hobsons , 43). While this statistic applies to all ethnicities, it directly correlates with the Hispanic experience. When there is no family background of higher education, students find it difficult to fully engage in college life, which can lead to higher rates of non-completion. This is prevalent for most first generation Latino undergraduate students, almost 50% of whose parents have not enrolled in or completed college (Camacho Liu , 3). With such precedents, it is clear to see why lower income students of all ethnicities reported less interest in in achieving a professional degree (Hobsons , 43).

Latino students are less likely to follow the traditional 4-year path through
education than white students. While community college and Associate’s Degrees are a great first step toward closing the higher education gap, more work needs to be done. Of Hispanic college students enrolled in community college, 71% expressed desire to go to a 4-year institution, yet only between 7-20% actually transfer to 4-year colleges or universities (Burciaga and Zarate, 26). Only 7% of Master’s Degrees were earned by Hispanic students in 2012, and of the whole Latino population, only 3% held a Master’s, lower than any other ethnic group (Santiago, Calderon Galdeano and Taylor, 10).

As I have discussed, even when the desire to attend college exists, a lack of knowledge regarding how to proceed toward accomplishing academic goals can impede success. Over 94% of parents surveyed across several studies indicated they placed a high level of importance and expectation on their children attaining higher education (Journal of Hispanic Higher Education – Parental Involvement) (Fann, McClafferty Jarsky and McDonough, 375). According to a Pew study, 9 in 10 Hispanic parents believe in college as a pathway to a better future. However, another study noted that 65% of Hispanic parents do not know how to help their student navigate the application process (Hispanic Scholarship Fund & Ad Council). A lack of knowledge amongst students and their parents on how to access information can lead to complications such as missed deadlines or misunderstood requirements. School personnel are the best resources for this kind of information, yet often fail to provide it (Burciaga and Zarate, 27). Additionally, the lack of financial planning creates obstacles in college attendance; 39% of Latino families planned financially for their child to attend college, but among “first-in-family” students, that number was just 25% (Sallie Mae, 35-36).
In the end, there is no one factor to definitively point to as the reason underrepresented students are less likely to attend college. For most students, it is a combination of overlapping factors that create the barrier to achieving educational goals. Unfortunately, there is no universal solution and we do not have the luxury of time. Encouraging Hispanic students to pursue higher education is not an option, but rather a requirement for our nation to remain competitive. As previously noted, the United States is entering an era where there will soon be a deficit of college graduates. Hispanics are a young growing population. On average, Latinos are 28 vs 43 years old (The Oregon Community Foundation, 4). The United States is behind other notable countries in higher education attainment (OECD) (Figure 1). If the United States would like to lead in regards to scholastic attainment, then investing in the success of this high potential population is imperative.

**Figure 1**

Higher Educational Attainment of 25-34 year-olds (2016)

Graph constructed from information found in OECD report: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933559161
A problem this complex requires a multifaceted approach, competent solutions, and the involvement of participants at all stages in the process. Advertising will not fix the problem, but utilizing advertising to expose students and parents to supportive messaging that guides them to begin considering higher education is a great place to start.

Advertising as a Tool

Advertising is one of four major activities in the marketing umbrella. Marketing is comprised of the activities that bring a product or service to the marketplace. These are qualities referred to as the four P’s; Product: the product or service itself, Price: value capture, Place: where the product or service may be found, and Promotion: the communication of the product or service via advertising. Advertising is defined as “a paid form of communication, delivered through media from an identifiable source, about an organization, product, service or idea, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, now or in the future” (Marketing - Grewal Levy, 553). As a result, advertising is often thought of negatively as a means to manipulate consumers to make purchases or buy products. Often, we hear about the harmfulness of advertising; for example, body negativity caused by impossible beauty standards in advertising. However, advertising can play a vital role in introducing consumers to products or services that fulfill a need they might have, such as higher education. In this context, a university is a service provider, because instead of offering a tangible product, they offer a service to students.
Service marketing differs from traditional product marketing in several key ways, the most prominent being that the Product (education) cannot be separated from the Place (where it is being delivered) (Marketing - Grewal Levy pg. 371). The institution can attempt to be flexible by offering options such as online classes, but ultimately, it provides the service, which is immediately consumed by the student. Services cannot be returned or exchanged. Attaining higher education is one of the most important decisions a person can make, as it has persistent socioeconomic implications. Some are immediate, such as time and financial return, while others such as opportunity resulting from the education are more long term. Therefore the consumer must feel a high degree of confidence during the selection process.

There are 4,600 degree granting institutions around the country creating many options for students seeking a higher education (AdMall). Each institution offers the same overall benefit, education, but provides a different path in which to achieve that in terms of service mix and offerings. These various approaches appeal to different prospective students. Students and parents must weigh the cost with the perceived benefit that is best for them. Most branding experts qualify the investment in higher education as an “emotional purchase” (Wexler). Those who are interested in pursuing higher education actively search to find their best fit. At the same time, it is important for institutions who want to reach an underserved demographic to make themselves visible and meet prospective students halfway in order to create a connection. Increasing the probability of exposure to a university’s messaging is particularly important for institutions catering to students who may not view higher education as an option. With appropriate messaging,
these students can be encouraged to look further and discover that a degree is within their reach.

Internet displays are the top advertising method used by universities currently, followed by outdoor, television, radio, and lastly, newspaper (AdMall). This makes sense, as younger demographic groups are more likely to engage with brands online and have a higher usage of media across multiple screens. Hispanics particularly spend more time than average accessing and consuming content online, on a smartphone or a desktop (Dolliver). Of Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2012) Internet users, about 40% spend between 2-3 hours consuming media a day, and 25% spend between 4-6 hours per day (Daily Time Spent Watching TV/Video According to Internet Users in North America, by Demographic, Feb 2017). Leveraging where potential students are with appropriate messaging is crucial to reach this demographic as they make decisions about their future.

With a service like education, the advertising direction many universities employ can become standardized and the messaging can seem unoriginal. Ellen Wexler notes in “Why College Brands Look So Similar,” that universities oftentimes get caught up in appealing to youth with visuals, and forget about the substance rendering the advertising effort ineffective. Instead they create generic messaging to appeal to a wide audience, which is devoid of a unique institutional identity many students find important. Wexler cites a case study in which two universities, 9,000 miles apart, utilized two different advertising agencies, yet both created campaigns around the concept of “Here.” They even employed a similar graphic language, down to the typographic choice and use of the
campus buildings in the visuals (Wexler).

University campaigns that truly provide a unique value proposition in an inspiring way, rather than trying to appeal to a mass audience, are most successful. The Thurgood Marshall College Fund launched a campaign in 2014 to address the enrollment challenges Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are facing to raise awareness about the benefits of HBCU education (DMS Marketing Team). The “#HCBULove” campaign identified the month of March as HBCU month. It solicited participation from HBCU students and graduates to share their HBCU pride moments utilizing the hashtag. The campaign was successful as it created solidarity and community amongst underrepresented students, alumni, and advocates who shared a personal passion to inspire the next generation of graduates (DMS Marketing Team). I highlight this campaign because it addresses similar goals to those of WOU, aiming to inspire enrollment growth among underrepresented youth. However, the campaign focused on supporting HBCUs in general, rather than a specific university. Still, participating institutions received a benefit in terms of exposure and created a larger network of solidarity for an important cause.

Another great example of marketing success in the university space is Babson College’s “The Entrepreneurs” campaign. It utilized a cinematic approach to communicate the focus of a Babson education, highlight business entrepreneurship, and showcase successful alumni as validation (DMS Marketing Team). This campaign provided aspirational images and actively avoided collegiate clichés, such “three students of varying ethnicities and gender, dressed head-to-toe in college-branded merchandise” (160over90,
The common thread of these campaigns is their execution. Their value proposition was present, but not explicit. Rather, the intention was to introduce their unique benefit to the student. While the HBCU campaign demonstrated support for black students, Babson’s conveyed the unique value that for those interested in entrepreneurship, theirs is the institution to attend.

Though advertising’s main objective is to promote and sway, it should be acknowledged that precedents about its uses for public benefit are abundant, Public Service Announcements (PSA’s) being one example. PSA campaigns are a highly impactful form of messaging that bring attention to issues. PSA campaigns influence and have the power to shape perceptions and ignite change. As Steve Mauldon, President and GM of CBS2/KCAL9 notes, “30 seconds can be a lifetime if it’s well done, well thought out, and meaningful” (Lujan). There a have been several National PSA campaigns, dating as far back as World War II when the Ad Council was created and entrusted with producing campaigns to promote war bonds sales (Lujan). Since then, it has created some of the most iconic campaigns, such as the Crying Indian campaign against pollution and wild fire prevention with Smokey Bear, which resulted in the saving of 14 million acres of land and contains the second most recognizable image in America (Ad Council , 2). Perhaps the most relevant campaign developed by the Ad Council is “Your Words Today,” in collaboration with Grupos Gallegos, which targeted Hispanic parents with low acculturation levels to empower them with resources to help guide their children toward the path of higher education (Hispanic Scholarship Fund & Ad Council). The campaign recognized that parents are a crucial source of inspiration for students who are open to
attaining higher education, but unknowledgeable when it comes to the process.

For WOU’s advertising, I propose framing the approach as an opportunity to advocate for social change. Utilizing a relatable story driven narrative approach, I believe we can positively impact the aspirations of Hispanic youth and increase underrepresented minority enrollment at WOU.

**WOU Efforts to Increase Underserved Population Enrollment**

Though advertising is the focus of my thesis, it is important to acknowledge marketing as a holistic process that involves more than just advertising. With advertising, the expectation of what the audience should receive from the product or service is set for them. However, the claims still have to be supported by the marketing effort. The focus on diversity and inclusion is not just an advertising tactic for WOU, but an extension of the core values it holds as an institution.

WOU’s commitment to diversity and reaching underserved communities has been a major focus of the University’s identity and has extended to the advertising strategy as far back as the 2005 launch of the *WOU & You, on the move!/WOU y tu,jhacia adelante!* campaign. Prior to this, hardly any advertising had been done by the university towards the general population, let alone underrepresented communities. In fact, WOU had the perception of being a Teacher’s College. This campaign was the first effort to break away from that image and actively reach the Hispanic demographic. It came about in large part
due to the work of Dave McDonald, the Associate Provost of WOU at the time and now Associate Vice President for Public Affairs and Strategic Initiatives. WOU had begun to carve out a niche for itself as an institution that served first-generation college students. Demographic trends at the time indicated that Latino undergraduates were most likely to be first generation students (D. A. Santiago, CHOOSING Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs): A Closer Look at Latino Students' College Choices, 4). Dave recognized the additional deficits Hispanic education faced in Oregon, as well as the opportunity available in reaching this growing group. In early conversations with Dave as my thesis advisor, he was clear in stating he was taking these demographic shifts into account as he planned the advertising strategy.

The WOU & You, on the move! campaign was a branding campaign for the university. Though it had the call to action of visiting the website, in general, it served to introduce the audience to WOU. One of the main elements of the campaign was the utilization of billboards, which were created in both English and Spanish to convey a message of inclusivity and opportunity (Figure 2). These billboards featured current WOU students against a blank white background. This deliberate graphic choice served to emphasize WOU as a student focused institution. The blankness also implied as sense of limitless possibilities. The images avoided the clichés of students studying, sitting on campus under a tree, or wearing school gear from head to toe that are so common with other schools. Instead, it showed students in a more natural state, relaxed and inviting.
The text on the billboards was simple and catchy; “WOU&YOU – on the move” for English billboards and the Spanish translation, “WOUyTÚ – hacia adelante”. This simple message conveyed a significant amount, including the partnership prospective students could expect with the institution, with the “on the move” portion implied progress and advancement.

Utilizing two languages in advertising and printed materials required a significant investment and the cost had to be weighed against the desired outcomes. In this instance, the cost was justified because the strategy allowed for prospective students, as well as parents, to relate to the students in the ads as aspirational figures. The English advertisements were meant to attract students of any ethnicity with the inviting images of the diversity WOU offered. Hispanic youth largely communicate in English, thus the materials in Spanish were not necessarily directed to the students, but rather their Spanish-speaking parents, with hopes of introducing the idea of higher education and encouraging a conversation on the topic. The Spanish ads also served an indirect benefit by showcasing WOU as a place that values Latino identity.

Dave has led many of the initiatives designed to promote success for
underrepresented groups at the university. Another significant contribution of his was the revolutionary Western Tuition Promise established in 2007. This program guaranteed no tuition increase for the first four years of a student’s education at WOU. The Western Tuition Promise was actually one of the main reasons I decided to pursue my education at WOU. The goal was to provide students with the ability to plan out their education knowing exactly what financial impact to anticipate. It also worked as an incentive for students to complete their education within four years (Western Oregon University). This was a revolutionary initiative in the educational landscape, and Western Oregon was the first public university on the west coast to implement something of that magnitude. This program provided access to students for whom affordability was a barrier to attendance, Hispanics being a growing portion.

Although a fantastic experiment and a considered success, the Tuition Promise was not a viable long-term solution to address the challenge of affordability. The next iteration of the program was the Tuition Choice. Established in 2012, the Tuition Choice allows students the option to select between the Tuition Promise and a traditional student tuition plan. If a student chooses the Tuition Promise, they will maintain the same tuition rate for four years, but it will be at a higher cost than the current tuition. If they select the Traditional Plan, they will initially save on tuition, but are subject to the volatility of the education market (Western Oregon University). The goal of the Tuition Choice is to allow students and families control over their financial options when it comes to investing in higher education. This autonomy is important since 43.6% of WOU freshmen are Pell Grant Recipients, 15% of those are underrepresented minority students, the majority of
whom are Latino. For the university, it has proven to be a great investment garnering increases in retention rates (Zatynski , 3). When students and families know what to expect, they are better equipped to plan and more likely to follow through.

In an interview with The Education Trust, Dave revealed what he views is WOU’s number-one advantage in ensuring student success, which is the advising processes that have been put in place (Zatynski 3). Students are required to meet with an advisor every term before they are allowed to enroll in classes. This allows the opportunity for intervention if something is happening academically or personally for the student that may interfere with their education. Additional advising is provided for students who are part of the Student Enrichment Program (SEP). SEP provides supplemental academic advising and facilitates the college experience for students who meet certain requirements. The goal of SEP is to provide “services and a supportive environment to equip first generation, low income, and students with disabilities with skills to be successful in college.” Additional benefits of SEP include supplemental grant aid, exposure to graduate programs, organic building of an internal support community for students, and study materials available for borrowing (Western Oregon University). The advising emphasis attempts to ensure no student falls through the cracks and, in Dave’s own words, ensures that when WOU ““open[s] the door to a student, we really open it all the way through a diploma”” (Zatynski , 3).

The Multicultural Student Services and Programs (MSSP) is another WOU office, whose focus it to provide resources for students of color to succeed by way of advising,
community building through social and campus events, mentorship, and student ambassadors (Western Oregon University). WOU currently has 62 clubs and student organizations, at least three of which cater to different subsets of the Hispanic student community (Western Oregon University). The UNIDOS club for example, is run by and provides resources for undocumented students, the Multicultural Student Union (MSU) provides a platform and promotes awareness on campus for students of multiple ethnic backgrounds, and MEChA promotes Latino and Chicano advancement on campus (Western Oregon University). Textbook rental programs also promote access and encourage student success at the institution (Zatynski, 3).

In a Marketing sense, these programs and opportunities give WOU a unique value proposition that provides a great competitive advantage for the university. However, it is driven by the passion to truly operate for the public good. WOU’s continued commitment to diversity is reflected in the Diversity Action Plan. Released in 2012, the Diversity Action Plan focuses on creating an inclusive culture to foster personalized student success. The statement released by then President Mark Weiss, acknowledged WOU’s emphasis on diversity “as a matter of institutional priority and an integral component of academic success” (WOU Diversity Action Plan).

Areas of emphasis in the Diversity Action Plan include a focus on social justice and a commitment to inclusivity. The second goal of the plan is to “Recruit and retain a diverse student population.” To this end, WOU committed to increase the percentage of enrolled minority students and see them through to graduation, as well as to “seek out, recruit,
recognize and support” students from marginalized populations (Western Oregon University). This initiative showcased WOU’s commitment to a culture of inclusivity.

A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis is a situation analysis utilized by marketers to evaluate where a company or institution lies in relation to its environment, and in relation to a specific objective (Marketing – pg. 41). A suitable SWOT begins with an objective, and in 2011, WOU’s was to increase its minority enrollment. With that in mind, I conducted a preliminary SWOT analysis which resulted in the following conclusions (Figure 2). At the time WOU was already the most ethnically diverse higher education institution in Oregon and had the highest percentage of Latino students, at 8.1% (Western Oregon University). For strengths, WOU could count on its small class sizes, comparative affordability for a four-year institution, numerous student ambassadors, and already relatively high minority student population.

**Figure 2**

**Objective:** Increase minority enrollment at Western Oregon University

As noted in the chart above, WOU’s weaknesses lay around access. WOU tuition is more expensive than alternative Oregon schools, which could dissuade potential students.
from attending. As a midsized school, WOU’s budgets might be smaller and less able to support initiatives. This directly correlates with WOU’s ability to successfully service the target demographic group, which requires a large amount of resources. The last weakness of note in the chart is social, in the lack of family involvement or knowledge about higher education. Rather than a threat, this is listed as a weakness because despite the lack of specific knowledge, my research had shown there was a general support for higher education in a majority of homes.

One opportunity that WOU could capitalize on immediately is the growing demographic of Hispanics. WOU already has several strong partnerships with high schools and community colleges in the area. Dual enrollment with Chemeketa and Clackamas Community College helps ease credit transfer and creates a higher likelihood for students to pursue a four year degree. Additionally, demographic projections have remained strong for the Latino group. According to the Pew Research Center, since the 60’s, “the nation’s Latino population has increased nearly nine-fold, from 6.3 million then to 56.5 million by 2015. It is projected to grow to 107 million by 2065” (Flores). Latinos now make up 13% of the state population of Oregon (Excelencia in Education, 1). WOU’s large Hispanic population size relative to other institutions gives it an advantage in understanding the needs of the group first hand. As the Hispanic population increases, WOU can be ready to respond to the needs of those students.

When observing the chart, threats for WOU are based around the competition. Students could choose to pursue their education at other universities, community colleges,
or decide altogether to forgo a college education and enter the workforce.

Though not exactly threats, something for WOU to consider as it moves forward with creating a plan to reach this demographic are obstacles surrounding recruitment. These include the challenge of affordability, the lack of knowledge among parents and students regarding the higher education process, and the lack of aspirations among students that often result in youth not pursuing higher education as an option until much later in their high school careers (Sallie Mae, 26).

Applying the four P’s of Marketing, the “product” we would be promoting is a quality education at WOU, an institution that understands and supports the unique challenges of underrepresented populations. The “Pricing” strategy of WOU was very competitive for a 4-year university. The estimated cost of attendance for the 2009-10 year was less than $8,500 (based on 15 credits per term) (Western Oregon Univesity). “Place” would be the campus or online, as this is where the service would be consumed. The last Marketing element, however, is the main focus of my thesis: promotion. The primary question to answers was how this marketing element be best used to help WOU fulfill its goal of continuing to promote educational gains amongst the underrepresented youth population, specifically Hispanics?

WOU has become a beacon for first-generation and underrepresented students as an institution that offers various supports (Western Oregon University). According to internal reports, “Since 2004, Latino enrollment at WOU has increased by 80%” (Western Oregon University). The school has also consistently maintained the highest percentage
of Latino enrollment amongst all Oregon public universities (Western Oregon University).

A recent news release noted WOU’s Hispanic population percentage at 14%, (Catto). This percentage actually exceeds the Hispanic population percentage of Oregon, which sits at 13% of the total state population (Excelencia in Education).

WOU has been commended by several institutions and publications for its approach to ensuring the educational success of underrepresented youth. In 2010, Education Trust named Western Oregon a top ten performer in the country for improvement in graduation rates of underrepresented minority students (Education Trust). The University was also recognized in 2012 with the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) award from the INSIGHT into Diversity magazine (Western Oregon University).

Historically, Hispanic graduation rates at WOU either meet or exceed the average graduation rate. The latest estimates in 2016 note that 45% of Latino students graduate within 6 years, versus the average graduation rate of 39%. The same report notes that first generation students at WOU had a graduation rate of 36.5%, trailing the average by only 2.5% (Western Oregon University). These statistics are a testament to the ample support and resources provided by the university to ensure these students’ success once they begin their education, but first they have to be encouraged to begin.
A typical marketing campaign is viable for about a five year span according to Dave. In 2010, the 5 years were up for the WOU and YOU On the Move campaign. Dave began the task of working with WOU’s agency of record, Bradshaw Advertising, to develop a new campaign. Though the overall goals would remain very similar, it was necessary to refresh the strategy to make sure WOU was maintaining the desired results in enrollment.

On February 4th 2010, Dave and I attended a strategy meeting with Bradshaw to review creative concepts and overall marketing direction. This was great exposure for me as an advertising student to see how a true marketing campaign develops. I was not present for the initial conversations, but I was brought in early enough to thoroughly witness the execution. At this meeting, Bradshaw was to present us with advertising concepts, and by the end of it, a concept direction would be established for WOU to move forward with. The advertising team began by describing the goals of the campaign as determined from previous conversations with Dave - to create a campaign establishing brand identity with a primary target of high school seniors; Secondarily, to reach recent high school graduates, and lastly, parents of potential students.

Next, Bradshaw presented a market analysis they conducted, which identified institutions that were top competitors for WOU in regards to reaching the target demo. These were Portland State University (PSU), Southern State University (SOU), George Fox, Linfield, Willamette University and Oregon State University (OSU). In the analysis, they described these institutions’ differentiating and comparable factors in relation to WOU.
Many of the comparable points related to the proximity of the schools. Linfield and Willamette University were also similar to WOU in their traditional student focus. However, unlike WOU, these two universities are private institutions. The institutions most similar to WOU overall were OSU and SOU. Both are public and have a traditional student focus. There was particular emphasis on OSU for the branding strength of its “Powered by Orange” campaign. The main differentiating factors Bradshaw identified for WOU were its first-generation student focus, size, and pricing advantage. This analysis created the basis for the strategy Bradshaw developed.

The next phase of the meeting was focused on the strategy elements, which were comprised of several parts. First, the distribution strategy addressed where the campaign would be placed to reach the target and was the most important to address initially. The creative strategy aimed to identify the most impactful way to deliver the message, and the content strategy looked at what message would be delivered to the audience.

The distribution strategy was developed by Bradshaw to fulfill the goal of developing brand identity for the university via four factors: outdoor placement, social, online, and radio. Similar to the previous strategy, the largest media component was to be billboards. Bradshaw recommended WOU invest most of the budget there because that medium provided the greatest amount of visibility and recognition. Social media was to be one of the main elements of the campaign as well, as it provided the benefits of ease of disseminating information, it is easily updated, and has the ability to assist with search engine optimization (SEO) efforts. This last component would be particularly
helpful as the campaign’s call to action would be for students to visit the website, thus driving optimal viewership. The social component extended beyond screens and attempted to impact the conversations of potential students with parents, counselors, teachers, and friends. Bradshaw was aware that one of the goals of the campaign was to reach Hispanic parents, and recommended utilizing radio for that purpose.

After addressing distribution, the creative strategy discussion began. The agency’s goal was to invoke a bold, edgy, impactful, and personable tonality for the WOU campaign to attract potential students. To that end, an additional distribution method proposed was movie theater screens in Salem, Washington, and Multnomah County. Extra emphasis was placed on Multnomah County, as 70% of WOU applicants resided there according to information compiled by Bradshaw. The creative strategy maintained the goal to effectively communicate the main message of “small school, small classes...big global opportunities.” Bradshaw knew that any campaign they developed for WOU would also need to work in Spanish to reach the full audience intended. To fulfill these goals, the agency presented five campaign directions. They broke down each in terms of differentiators, values, and drivers of the campaign (Table 1). Bradshaw asked for feedback and everyone at the meeting discussed at length the merits of each campaign and how it would deliver on WOU’s goals. In the end, the campaign that resonated the most with what WOU wanted to accomplish as an institution, was The Future You campaign.
### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campaign</th>
<th>Differentiators</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Drivers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major/Minor</td>
<td>• Category Advertising&lt;br&gt;• Comparative</td>
<td>• Education&lt;br&gt;• Personal Attention</td>
<td>• Identifies with students&lt;br&gt;• It is present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elements of WOU</td>
<td>• Mainstream&lt;br&gt;• Sophisticated&lt;br&gt;• Serious</td>
<td>• Scholastic&lt;br&gt;• Opportunities for personalization</td>
<td>• Places quality on education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Education</td>
<td>• Approachable&lt;br&gt;• Fun</td>
<td>• Education&lt;br&gt;• Doors opening&lt;br&gt;• More choices</td>
<td>• Future opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be</td>
<td>• Emotional&lt;br&gt;• Inspirational&lt;br&gt;• Personal</td>
<td>• Opinions/ Perceptions</td>
<td>• Desire for acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Future You</td>
<td>• Inspirational&lt;br&gt;• Confident&lt;br&gt;• Strong</td>
<td>• Status&lt;br&gt;• Success</td>
<td>• Aspirations&lt;br&gt;• Future</td>
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*The Future You* campaign had the key characteristics WOU was looking to carry forward. The concept behind *The Future You* campaign was to write creative notes in the form of inspirational quotes, life updates, or short statements from the perspective of the viewer’s future self. Key features (differentiators) of this campaign were the inspirational, confident, and strong tone the campaign carried. The fact that the student’s future self was “sending” this message was meant to boldly imply the value of a WOU education. It also tied in directly to the awareness that needed to be created amongst prospective students. The values placed on status and success put forth by *The Future You* campaign were meant to attract students based on the drivers of aspirational messaging and a desire for a successful future. Bradshaw suggested four initial directions from whom the message would “come from.” One was a teacher, as WOU is known for the focus on this
degree and the profession conveys emotional fulfillment. The second direction was a doctor, a universally respected profession. Bradshaw also suggested we promote an international direction to allude to the “global opportunities" available to graduates, and of course, the Hispanic direction to appeal to the growing demographic. During the meeting we expanded the possibilities for the direction options to include a business angle to discuss financial success and incorporate the full gamut of potential influencing factors for a student deciding to pursue a college education.

One of the most impactful features of this campaign was the degree of versatility it offered. Dave immediately saw the potential this one offered over the others with regards to content development. Messages could be written student to parent, student to student, in Spanish or English. Messages could be serious or they could be fun. When we left that meeting, the entire team had agreed on the framework for WOU’s next campaign. Bradshaw provided us with a great structure and invaluable creative execution, but we decided to develop copy internally (Table 2).
My contribution the campaign was in the form of providing perspective as a member of the target market and creating billboard and radio copy in both languages to target Hispanic parents and students. While the messages would be aspirational in nature for both, the delivery would be slightly modified for each. Both would feature WOU students speaking directly to the listener or viewer. The messaging directed at students in English would show either themselves in the future, or another WOU student. Parents would receive a targeted message expressed as if it were coming from their son or daughter in the future.
In preparation, I compiled research and began conversations with Dave where he counseled me on the specific parameters of radio spot creation. These were areas like word count and calls to action; I knew about these in a general sense from business classes, but now was able to apply them in a real world context. I also conducted independent research to understand the decision making process for Hispanic and first generation students (See trends and traditional barriers section). One of the most applicable pieces of information I gathered from the research was the influence of faculty as the most important factor in retaining students. Students are also highly reliant on peers for recommendation, encouragement, and to make the choice to attend school (Perez, 24).

It was also important to incorporate first hand student experience, other than my own. Dave advised me to set up an interview with Maria Mendoza\(^1\) the first Latina Student Body President at WOU, in order to gain insight from another student who embodied all of the qualities we were looking to attract with our advertising. I conducted an interview to learn what guided her to WOU and the programs she found most beneficial in her experience, in order to utilize that information and distill it into an advertisement. Her story was similar in many ways to my own. She was a first generation low-income student. Though she had older siblings, they had not attended school and she hoped to be an inspiration to her younger brother. She acknowledged the attraction of a small campus, student culture groups, and a strong support system available to her, as sources of empowerment that encouraged her to run for student government. The financial support

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1 Name used as pseudonym due to not being able to obtain the required human subjects approval to include the student’s name or identifying features in this thesis.
she received from WOU was enough that she did not have to work, though she did need to take out loans. I condensed the interview into four key points: the need to belong, WOU as a good investment, economic assistance, and a sense of support from attending WOU.

When I reached out to Maria, I did so with the intention of writing an advertisement based on her experience, which she would voice for the radio spot in a testimonial format. Several drafts were created to that effect, but unfortunately, an inability to coordinate schedules made it impossible to complete. The idea was dismissed, but we were still able to utilize some key selling points she identified to create an upbeat advertisement that directly spoke to the larger audience of recent high school graduates (Figure 3).

**Figure 3 - English Radio Spot (for students)**

*So you just graduated high school. Congratulations!*
*Where are you spending your next 4 years?*
*How about Western Oregon University?*
*Ranked as one of US News & World Report’s top regional institutions in the west, Western Oregon University is big enough to be good but small enough to be great.*
*W-O-U redefines what higher education can mean with its small classes that ensure personal attention from talented faculty members in fields like Teaching, Business, Art, and Music.*
*You will also enjoy the environmentally friendly new Ackerman Dorms and the equally environmental Health and Recreation center.*
*Best of all, you can get everything W-O-U has to offer for less than you’d expect!*
*The innovative tuition promise guarantees your tuition rates will stay the same for your first four years saving you money and giving you more time to study and succeed.*
*You’re going places and W-O-U can help you get there. So don’t wait.*
*Check out the school PARADE magazine rated one of the top 20 best small schools in the country.*
*Start your future today at W-O-U- dot-edu.*
For the parent radio advertisement, the goal was to give Hispanic parents enough information to be influential and knowledgeable so as to encourage them to have a conversation with their student. The research I collected spoke to parents’ belief that college led to a better future and highlighted their desire to help their student obtain a college education, but also their lack of knowledge in how to assist to make that happen (Fann, McClafferty Jarsky and McDonough , 375).

There were a few versions written in an attempt to communicate the message. One version spoke to parents in a storybook format. We ultimately decided to create a conversational message, from a daughter, thanking her parents for reaching out to WOU and recounting the benefits to students like her that the university can offer (Figure 4). In a direct way, this advertisement also functioned as the first resource WOU offered prospective families.
The development of each of these elements was a very collaborative process between my thesis advisor and myself. Several drafts of radio copy were written by me and reviewed by my advisor. His input was utilized to rework the copy until it conveyed the most effective message within the 60-second constraint of a radio slot. The process to develop the billboard copy was just as involved. Dave and I discussed the initial goals and set the parameters before putting pen to paper.

Similar to the Spanish radio ad, the Spanish billboard would display an inspirational message from the student to the parent. However, the billboard media provided the
opportunity for an interactive communication that changed the message based on the viewer’s perspective. Parents viewing the billboard saw a message from their son or daughter in the future. For students viewing, they saw a message from themselves to their parents. The English billboard copy was developed to be direct messages from the student’s future self. For those it was decide that it would be best to focus on popular majors offered at the university and create aspirational messages. The majors we decided to focus on were Social Work, Teaching, Business, Biology, Criminal Justice and Psychology. The intent wasn’t to create a billboard for every single major, but to have a large base to select a few impactful messages. We narrowed down the top copy choices in both languages and Dave organized a focus group among counselors to review all and gather feedback to turn over to Dave and Bradshaw Advertising for final rendering (Figure 5 & 6).

**Figure 5**

Possible Spanish Billboards

"Fui primero en graduarme, pero no el ultimo"
"El día de mi graduación, vi el orgullo en sus ojos"
"me hicieron lo que soy, me ayudaron en el camino"
"fueron mis guías, son mi inspiración"
"nuestra cultura y su apoyo fueron los mejores motivadores"
"gracias a ustedes, no perdí nada, gane todo"
"gracias a ustedes no perdi quien soy, realice quien podia ser"

I was the first to graduate, but not the last

On my graduation day, I saw the pride in your eyes

You made me who I am, you helped me along the way

You were my guides, you are my inspiration

Our culture and your support were the best motivators

Thanks to you, I didn’t lose anything, I gained everything

Thanks to you, I did not lose who I am, I realized who I want to be
It was a privilege to be a part of the planning and creation of the 2011 Future You campaign. Under the mentorship of Dave, I was provided the opportunity to significantly contribute to an entire marketing effort as an undergraduate. Being able to utilize skills learned at WOU combined with my unique personal experience for the purpose of fostering a positive impact among students like myself felt like coming full-circle in my journey through education. This exposure reinforced my desire to pursue Marketing and Advertising as a career and initiated a new goal to utilize it for the greater good.

WOU Spirit Campaign

I learned a great deal about campaign execution by observing the 2011 campaign develop. The next step was to apply what I had learned by developing and executing a micro campaign of my own.

The objective was to develop a creative contest around the concept of “WOU
In conversations with my thesis advisor, we concluded Social Media to be the most accessible and far reaching platform and it became apparent that a web based format would be the desired distribution method for this contest. In addition, it aligned with the university's initiatives for utilizing social media as a tool toward evolving and establishing WOU's brand identity. The “How Do You WOU?” campaign was the result (Figure 7).

The contest was designed to be a fun way for incoming undergraduates to connect with their new campus. In addition to being a fun contest, the strategy relied upon utilizing a platform that students are already familiar with (the Internet) to expedite the integration of incoming students into the campus community. This was an important goal as research shows that university completion rates increase when students feel more involved with their campus. While this would help all students, it could be particularly
beneficial to minority students who typically have a harder time acclimating to college life.

Participants were asked to submit a form of art showcasing their WOU Spirit to the contest Facebook page. The contest was media agnostic, which meant that a wide mix of media was accepted, such as video, still photos, music, artwork, and many other forms of expression.

A winner would be awarded, based on the number of likes, every two weeks for the duration of the summer, starting during Summer Orientation Advising and Registration (SOAR) and ending with the final prize awarded during New Student week.

For several reasons, the contest was ultimately unsuccessful. One of the primary factors was the flawed strategy. The contest launched late and there was limited strategy in place to reinforce messaging to encourage participation once it did. The rules of the contest were too complicated and the launch became buried among many other notifications new students were receiving. At the time, Facebook functionality was too limited and temporary to successfully host this type of contest.

Another executional flaw was my inability to effectively coordinate the deliverables and execution of the campaign. We thought that creating a fun campaign would be enough to secure participation, but research actually shows that new students are more interested in campus academic offerings and mentorship (Hobsons, 16). This was not a project that catered to that.

Ultimately, this was a great learning experience, though it did not achieve the
desired result. Despite the lack of success, I learned a great deal; Lessons I have carried into my current career in marketing.

**Social Climate**

National trends indicate a growing shift in demographic composition throughout the country, where minority representation is increasing in percentage of the population. A large part of the growth comes from United States births. Specifically in Oregon, only 36% of Latinos are foreign born, while 64% are United States born (The Oregon Community Foundation, 7). While not all foreign-born Latinos are undocumented, some are. This implies that many Latinos in this state live within mixed-status families. This is exactly what it sounds like, individuals with different legal statuses, and it is estimated that in the United States, roughly 16.6 million people fall into this category (Enriquez, 942). An article from the Education Writers association by Natalie Gross notes that families that include undocumented family members can face stress that can be detrimental to the educational development of the children in the home, as it can lead to parents being less engaged and more anxious (Gross, Experts: Keeping Families Together Helps Immigrant Students). As a result, legal and political policy targeting the undocumented community not only affects them, but also makes United States born counterparts and family members vulnerable to falling through educational and social cracks.

In addition to the systematic barriers in place for underrepresented populations, undocumented students have to face the additional barrier presented by their
immigration status. Each year, about 65,000 undocumented students who have lived in the United States for 5 years or longer, graduate from American high schools (R. G. Gonzales, Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students, 4). Peers are strong influencers for most choices, including college aspirations and college selection (Perez, 7). If some of those peers are not looking into college as a result of their immigration status, it becomes an impediment not only for them, but for the community as a whole.

The complicated issue of undocumented students and education began with the Supreme Court decision in the Plyler v. Doe case. The precedent set allowed undocumented children access to public education at the primary and secondary level (R. G. Gonzales, Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students, 11). At the time of the decision, high school education was enough to obtain work that provided a satisfactory standard of living. That is no longer the case, and as a result, the incentive to graduate high school for many students, regardless of immigration status, is gone (R. G. Gonzales, Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students, 12). Being an undocumented student carries with it additional barriers such as a lack of financial aid, or affordable tuition, making it very difficult for these students to achieve any higher education goals (Burciaga and Zarate, 28). Thanks to the Plyler v. Doe decision, investment has already been made in the K-12 education of undocumented students (R. G. Gonzales, Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students, 12). However, the investment, should students not continue to college, becomes lost.
Several pieces of legislation, at the state and national level, have been presented to mitigate these issues and allow this segment of the population the opportunity to pursue educational goals available to United States born counterparts. One initiative has been in-state tuition. Currently, undocumented students are subject to out-of-state tuition rates, should they disclose their immigration status. Out-of-state tuition can be many times more expensive than regular tuition, thereby increasing the already cost-prohibitive aspect of higher education. In-state tuition would allow undocumented students that comply with residency requirements to access education at the same cost as other resident students. This has failed on a national level, but since 2001, 18 states have passed in-state tuition bills for students graduating from United States high schools (R. G. Gonzales, Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students , 19). The State of Oregon’s version of in-state tuition, SB 2787 (Tuition Equity in Oregon), took effect July 2013. Despite the progress that has been made on a state level, most attempts for progressive policies on a national level have been unsuccessful. Education for these students is regretfully tied to immigration policy, a contentious and divisive topic in the United States.

Small concessions have been won to advocate for the education of vulnerable youth, but the true Holy Grail of opportunity for undocumented students lies in the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. According to advocates, “The DREAM Act would provide 360,000 undocumented high school graduates with legal means to work and attend college and could provide incentives for another 715,000 youngsters between the ages of 5 and 17 to finish high school and pursue post-secondary”
education (R. G. Gonzales, Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students, 22). This legislation, proposed at the national level, has not been able to pass due to polarizing opinions regarding immigration. However, states like California and Texas have passed bills containing in-state tuition benefits for undocumented students, and as a result, have seen positive economic impacts (Gonzales and Kohli). Unfortunately, because these bills involve immigration issues, opponents challenge them as they have done with AB 540 in California (R. G. Gonzales, Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students, 20).

Oregon is a state that progressively looks to close the education gap for underrepresented communities. Legislation such as the Oregon Promise (SB 81) passed in July of 2015, among many things, allowed for $10 million in funds to cover 2 years of community college for any Oregon High School graduate or GED recipient, regardless of citizenship status (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, iii). The Oregon Promise (SB 81) is a “last-dollar” program, meaning it covers the difference other grants and/or scholarships do not cover (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, iii). Hispanic students comprised nearly 20% of the recipients of the Oregon Promise, second only to white students who are 65% of recipients (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 14). The first term of the Oregon Promise program served nearly 6,800 students (5.4% of community college enrollment in the fall of 2016) (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, iv).

Oregon specific education laws include HB 5024 & SB 5507 designed to support
under-served populations through financial support. HB 3063 expands ASPIRE, a program that helps expand the number of underserved, low-income, and first generation students entering college and progress to a degree or certificate. SB 418 develops recommendations for improving college readiness in high school (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 4). SB 253 established the 40-40-20 goal: 40% of Oregonians will have a Bachelor’s degree or higher, 40% will have an Associate’s, and 20% will have a high school or equivalent (The Oregon Community Foundation, 15). As a state, Oregon understands that for its long term future, it will need to invest in traditionally underrepresented populations, especially as they are estimated to experience the most growth as current population trends indicate (The Oregon Community Foundation, 5).

The closest DREAM Act advocates have come in regards to national educational benefits of undocumented students, is the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Executive Order signed by President Barrack Obama in 2012. According to the contents of the executive action, “DACA provides an opportunity for a segment of the population to remain in the country without fear of deportation and allows them to apply for work permits” (Gonzales and Terriquez, 1). While the program contains many of the benefits of the Dream Act, it is missing one of the most desired components of granting a path to citizenship, which is the ultimate security for undocumented people.

Since its enactment, it has provided many opportunities to undocumented students and economic benefits to the US at large. A study of the economic benefits of the DACA program in all states over 10 years, conducted by the Center for American
Progress, noted the cumulative increase in earnings of DAPA and DACA eligible workers would be an estimated $107 trillion, and would account for more than 40% of the cumulative increase in GDP. Oregon DAPA and DACA eligible workers alone, would account for almost $1.3 billion of the cumulative increase in earnings over the next 10 years (Mathema). This is as a result of a large amount of young professionals entering the workforce and contributing at a higher rate than they would be able to otherwise without access to legally work. In a national survey of DACA recipients, 61% of respondents indicated that DACA allowed them to pursue educational opportunities that were previously closed to them (Tom K. Wong, United We Dream, National Immigration Law Center, and Center for American Progress, 3). Despite its economic benefits, anti-immigration lawmakers have attempted to sue the government for passing it, and in September of 2017, they received their wish as the DACA program was terminated by President Donald Trump, leaving as many at 700,000 young people without any deportation protection when their work permits expire (Naylor). This seemed to prove the fears of many in the underrepresented community, which without a true permanent solution, the educational and social stability of the undocumented community, and by extension minorities, would be subject to policy whims and used for political leverage.

When DACA was first instituted, many students became hopeful about the opportunity that became available to them. The 2016 election cycle saw a shift in the immigration conversation. Where it previously seemed to have been moving forward in regards to access, immigrants, very specifically immigrant youth, found themselves in the center of hostile campaign promises. After the election, it became apparent that the
stigma and negative sentiments were not going away. Continued attacks instill a sense of insecurity for families who depend on these laws and add yet another barrier to success for student and community progress. Mark Hugo Lopez, the director of Hispanic Research at the Pew Center, noted that social protections against deportation may help students’ educational prospects by allowing them to seek education and financial resources without fearing deportation (Gross, Experts: Keeping Families Together Helps Immigrant Students). This was certainly a benefit of DACA. Now without this protection, it leaves many students who were anticipating an opportunity, and many already in the system, wondering what’s next for them as they face the new immigration policies of this administration (Gross, Schools Offer Counseling As Many Latino Students Face Bullying, Uncertainty After Trump Win).

The pressure is not only felt by undocumented students, but also by many students of color. Despite the safety of legal status, they are still a target of growing anti-immigrant sentiment. Many schools began to offer counseling as schools K-12 saw racially targeted incidents rise after the 2016 election (Gross, Schools Offer Counseling As Many Latino Students Face Bullying, Uncertainty After Trump Win). In addition to the increased racial tensions seen across schools in the US, another anticipated impact of the Trump administration is the proposed decrease to public school funding. In a report by NPR, overall school funding could be cut by 13.5%, and there has been discussion to shift a portion of the remaining budget away from public schools and into charter schools (Turner). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there are over 98,000 public schools across the country. 51% qualify as lower income, and 50% of the overall student
population identify as students of color (any ethnicity other than white) (Costello). If this budget moves forward, it would negatively affect public schools, many of which are already underfunded, and consequently disproportionately affect low-income minority students. As an institution of higher learning, WOU has a social responsibility to take these statistics into account as it works to provide access for its student population.

*Western Oregon University advertising targeting Hispanic population specifically: 2018*

While Oregon Hispanic population growth is projected to continue to increase faster than the national average (The Oregon Community Foundation, 5), Oregon’s percentage of White, Hispanic and Asian American high school graduates entering higher education (within 16 months of graduation) is below the national average with Hispanic enrollment at 15% lower. Factors noted as potential explanations include the increasing cost of education, and a growing dissatisfaction with career and economic prospects (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, KPM 2). On a promising note, the average public university graduation rate for all ethnicities in Oregon has exceeded target graduation rates since 2015 (The Oregon Community Foundation, KPM 7). WOU, in particular, claims a 17% Hispanic student composition and 57% graduation rate among this group (Higher Education Coordinating Commission). This implies that despite declining student enrollment, universities are experiencing success in supporting student graduation once they enter the higher education system.
WOU is also a partner school in the DREAM.US. They are the only Oregon University that is both partner and national participant. In 2017 WOU completed a nine-month long process to put in place a strategic plan to carry WOU from 2017 – 2023. The “Forward Together” strategic framework is a plan to ensure a continued focus on student success. This new strategy continues to “support and enhance recruitment efforts for first-generation and underrepresented students” but the larger focus is for WOU “to become Oregon’s campus of choice for students, faculty and staff who seek a student-centered learning community” (Western Oregon University). To this end, the University has unveiled a new communication initiative visible through the new tagline, the TOGETHER WE SUCCEED tagline which is complemented by five additional statements that reinforce the overarching vision of progress through unity; “Together we achieve, Together we learn, Together we engage, Together we lead, and Together we thrive” (Western Oregon University).

WOU is no longer working with the Bradshaw Agency for the advertising and has in fact pulled back from advertising in general. As previously mentioned, Dave McDonald is now the Associate Vice President for Public Affairs and Strategic Initiatives and is no longer directly overseeing marketing efforts. Marketing developed into the department of Marketing and Strategic Communications (MARCOM) in 2016. According to the MARCOM mission statement, marketing will be relationships and word-of-mouth focused (Western Oregon University). Word of Mouth Marketing (WOM) is a cost effective and powerful form of advertising. According to Ramona Sukhraj, 92% of people trust
recommendations from their friends (Word-of-Mouth Marketing - 7 Actionable Strategies You need to Know).

Mock Advertising Campaign

In coordination with the WOU Strategic Plan, the Strategic Planning Committee conducted a SWOT analysis in 2016. This Analysis revealed a very similar situation to that of 2010. Weaknesses continue to be affordability and lacking a consistent marketing presence. Threats continue to include WOU’s perception as a Teacher’s College, but unfortunately has also expanded to include a political climate that has adversely affected education at all levels (Western Oregon University).

Though threats and weaknesses are significant, WOU has many strengths and opportunities to be able to prosper, even in this environment. Strengths for the institution continue to be its small class sizes, focus on underrepresented populations, and engaged faculty. Particularly for Hispanic Students, for whom faculty was the most important factor for student retention and for whom lack of Hispanic Faculty was “the primary cofactor of Hispanic student attrition” from higher education institutions (Cejda, Casparis and Rhodes, 6). A consistent theme that emerged when evaluating opportunities for WOU was the need to raise awareness for various aspects of the University, including programs and overall brand recognition. With that in mind, the campaign I propose for this exercise is the Ask a Wolf campaign. This campaign leverages the strengths and
opportunities determined in the SWOT analysis and addresses the most prominent weaknesses and threats (Table 3).

**Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campaign</th>
<th>Differentiators</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Drivers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask a Wolf</td>
<td>• Approachable</td>
<td>• Education</td>
<td>• Identifies with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fun</td>
<td>• Personal Attention</td>
<td>• It is present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Inspirational</td>
<td>• Opportunities for personalization</td>
<td>• Future opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal</td>
<td>• Success</td>
<td>• Aspirations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The concept behind *Ask a Wolf* is to leverage the existing student body to encourage communication among current students and potential students and their parents. By doing so, the university would advance the “Forward Together” strategic framework. Through various media platforms, prospective students and parents would be encouraged to reach out to current students to answer their questions or the institution to learn more about higher education and WOU in particular. This campaign would advance WOM recognition and position WOU as a resource with the surrounding communities and particularly with underrepresented populations that require more help navigating the higher education process.

WOU has more than 8,000 enrolled students, 17% of whom are Hispanic (Oregon Higher Education University Snapshot – WOU 2016-17). That is more than 8,000 ambassadors and at least 8,000 potential conversations about what the University has to offer. For Hispanic students, getting this type of in (Higher Education Coordinating Commission). Undocumented students in particular, noted they relied heavily on peer
support when first entering higher education and recommended undocumented students beginning their search solicit information from former and current students in campuses they may be interested in attending (Perez, 25). By providing a platform to do this, WOU would gain credibility with students for whom access is an obstacle.

In the past, WOU’s advertising campaigns have employed versatile messaging that can work in English and in Spanish in an effort to reach non-Hispanic students as well as Hispanic students and their parents. The Ask a Wolf campaign is similar in this respect and utilizes WOU’s strengths as an engaged, student focused institution but advances the narrative of WOU as a school that is eager to engage with diverse students and promote student success. Previous campaigns targeted high school seniors as the desired audience. However, a report on Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) suggests targeting freshmen or sophomores may be more efficient in encouraging students to pursue higher education (D. A. Santiago, CHOOSING Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs): A Closer Look at Latino Students' College Choices, 13). Consequently, the target audience for this campaign will shift to early high school students and potentially middle school students, with the goal of engaging them at a younger age.

This campaign would primarily utilize social media platforms to advance WOM recognition. However, additional creative would be designed for wider use with the purpose of promoting the call to action of engaging with the university and/or its students on a more casual basis. Social media is particularly beneficial when targeting Hispanics as they tend to spend more time than the non-Hispanic population using the internet on
mobile devices (Dolliver, 7). The primary social media platform *Ask a Wolf* campaign would utilize is Facebook, since Hispanic Millennials and Gen X (their parents) both are heavy users (McNair, 4). Facebook makes it easy to create live stream sessions, via the Facebook Live functionality. In these sessions viewers can interact with the student ambassadors. Though Facebook is still a great platform for these types of interactions, the Facebook audience is getting older and while might be a great tool for parents and students to utilize together (McNair, 6). To target Generation Z directly, it may be more beneficial to reach out utilizing newer platforms like Snapchat and Instagram where younger users spend their time (McNair, 10).

Social media, like Instagram and Snapchat, provide a window into campus culture for students. By creating an engaging presence, WOU can influence its perception and shift it from a teachers college in a sleepy town (Western Oregon University) to an engaging student centered institution. Upon evaluation of current social media usage, my recommendation is to utilize more student created content or content that speaks to what is going on around campus. Some of the most liked posts currently on Instagram, are spontaneous posts that feature students and campus life. For structured Instagram Posts, the university might consider a promoting *Ask a Wolf* sessions or creating advertisements that feature questions and a call to action to “Ask a Wolf” (Figure 8).
A major component of the *Ask a Wolf* campaign is an “active testimonial” approach. Current students would be the face of the institution and through the use of social media platforms, prospective students and parents would have the opportunity to ask questions around anything they might deem beneficial like their life on campus or regarding their field of study. For the “active testimonials” WOU might consider selecting model students in the fields of study WOU wishes to promote or student athletes and devoting specific *Ask a Wolf* sessions to them. While these exchanges would be structured, the overarching intention is to foster organic conversation with any WOU student offline and position WOU as a trusted student resource. In this way, reinforcing a community attitude and actively demonstrating the “Together We...” spirit WOU desires to foster.

This campaign has the potential and flexibility to target a large variety of audiences. My intent at the outset was to specifically target underrepresented Hispanic students and their parents. To that end I propose bilingual sessions with first generation Hispanic students. Promoting these events with middle schools and high schools would be important in guaranteeing engagement. One way to do this could be to reach out to
teachers and encourage them to make it a homework assignment or for WOU to host them during specific time periods when high school students might be able to tune as part of their classes. Advertising is more likely to be effective when the content is changed. Content includes changes in media, product, segments, scheduling (Tellis, 242). The flexibility of this media mix and the scheduling further creates a dynamic campaign that safeguards from students becoming blind to the message and promotes engagement.

For broader advertising efforts, Ask a Wolf campaign commercials would be developed. As previously mentioned, I believe taking inspiration from PSA’s would serve the institution well. Michael Taylor, Chair of Film notes “....If you incorporate fact based information into a fictionalized storytelling, it has a greater impact on audiences” (Lujan). Video has a unique ability to create awareness for a brand while viewers are actively engaged with content and it is particularly beneficial for influencing tuition decision makers. According to AdMall’s local intelligence report on Colleges, Universities, And Professional Schools in the State of Oregon TV (on any devise) is the most effective type of advertisement that has led to a response for potential tuition buyers, leading 43% to take action within 30 days of seeing an advertisement and 72% to take action within 12 months (AdMall). For this reason, a consistent branding effort is ideal, with advertising boosts planned prior to peak enrollment periods of fall and spring (AdMall). The Ask a Wolf Campaign is branding based, but allows the flexibility to make shifts and focus its message during this time to push for enrollment.
Creative would include copy points that list goods and services to attract the most attention (AdMall). This is a point of importance for Hispanic families where the merits of higher education might still be in contention. According to the Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, Latino parents have two primary concerns when it comes to their children and higher education; campus safety for girls, and the delayed financial benefits (Fann, McClafferty Jarsky and McDonough, 379). Taking a cue from the Ad Campaign Your Words Today, Hispanic culture is one based on idioms and common catchphrases. Utilizing this as a function of the creative would be able to relate to the Hispanic audience in a personal way (Hispanic Scholarship Fund & Ad Council). However, always bringing the call to action to learn more or to reach out to the institution or a Wolf. This is important as it allows students and their parents to see someone similar to them succeed and takes an aspirational figure into the tangible.

In addition to Social Media and TV, print media is also a trusted source for institutional information. Traditional viewbooks aid in the joint decision making process and are seen as credible by parents (Hobsons, 24). Additionally, after TV, print media is the next most influential medium in leading to action from tuition buyers. 83% of those surveyed responded within 30 days and 68% within a year after exposure (AdMall). WOU has made a concerted effort to create engaging printed materials. I believe an enhancement that could be considered as part of the Ask a Wolf campaign could be to include information about where to find the upcoming sessions and allow them to submit questions for students that might not want to participate in the Facebook Live sessions. There could be an additional option among the materials to truly “Ask a Wolf” and allow...
students to submit a request to speak with a WOU student and learn more about a specific major or particularly for underrepresented students, who would benefit from more personal attention, speak with someone from anyone of the on-campus students clubs like Unidos, MEChA, or a Diversity Scholar.

Additional promotional opportunities include creating events for the entire family including any young kids (D. A. Santiago, CHOOSING Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs): A Closer Look at Latino Students' College Choices , 13) (Closer Look at Latino College Choices). These provide an opportunity for the entire family to participate in the college experience and promote a larger support group for the student ultimately leading to higher success.

With regards to the geographic areas for advertising, most students are drawn within 100 mi radius (AdMall). For WOU, this means focusing on the counties between Lane County to the south and Cowlitz County to the north. Of course, WOU can and should continue to tap into regional and international relationships, but particularly when targeting Hispanics locally, WOU would do best to target areas with higher Hispanic populations (Figure 9).
The *Ask a Wolf* campaign ultimately serves to position WOU as a resource for students. With regards to the last component of executing an ad campaign, assessing the impact, as this is a mock campaign, the campaign will not have an impact to measure (Table 4).
### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps in Planning an Ad Campaign (Marketing, Grewal Levy pg. 553)</th>
<th>Ask a Wolf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Identify the Target Audience**                              | High School Students  
Middle School Students  
Parents of potential students |
| **Set Advertising Objectives**                                | To create a campaign establishing brand identity among the target audiences. |
| **Determine the Advertising budget**                          | $146,115 (same budget as 2011 but to account for inflation) |
| **Convey the Message**                                        | “Together We ...Succeed”  
...achieve” ...learn” ...engage” ...lead” ...thrive” |
| **Evaluate and Select the Media**                              | Social Media, Digital and traditional video, |
| **Create the Advertisement**                                  | Creative will be developed by students |
| **Assess the impact**                                          | As this is a mock campaign that has not been executed, the campaign will not have an impact. |

I had a great time creating this campaign and truly believe that it is an innovative way to consider advertising to potential students and, particularly, underrepresented students. It is my hope that this campaign as a whole or its components may be integrated into WOU’s next advertising campaign. In this way I hope to continue to contribute to a place that has offered me so much and allowed me to realize my higher education dreams, if only a bit later than originally anticipated.
Works Cited

Advertising and Promotion: An Integrated Marketing Communications Perspective. n.d.


