- Harmonies
- Songcraft
- Beach vibes
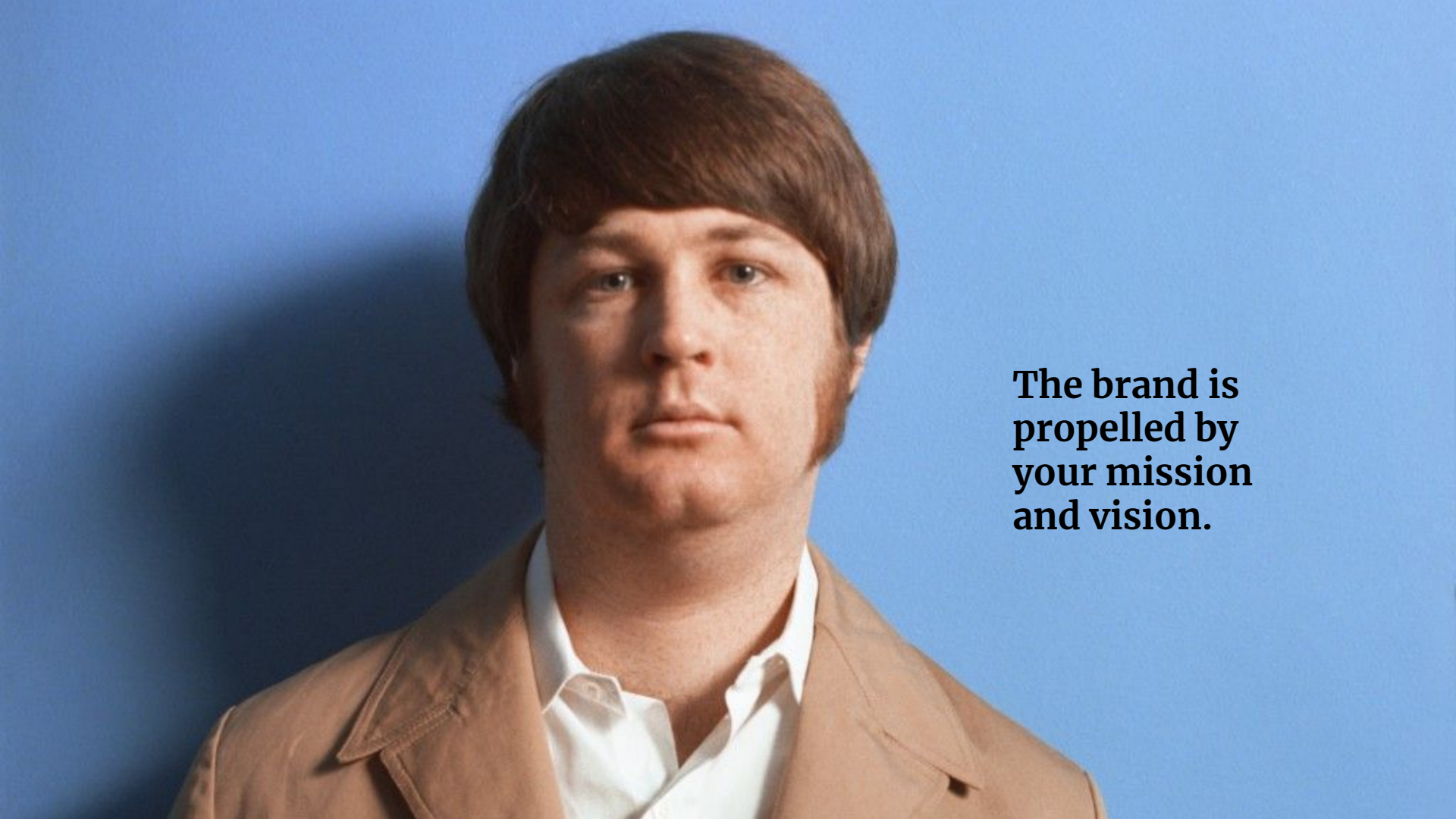
The brand is propelled by your mission and vision.

1962

1971

Same core brand attributes, but the expression evolves over time.
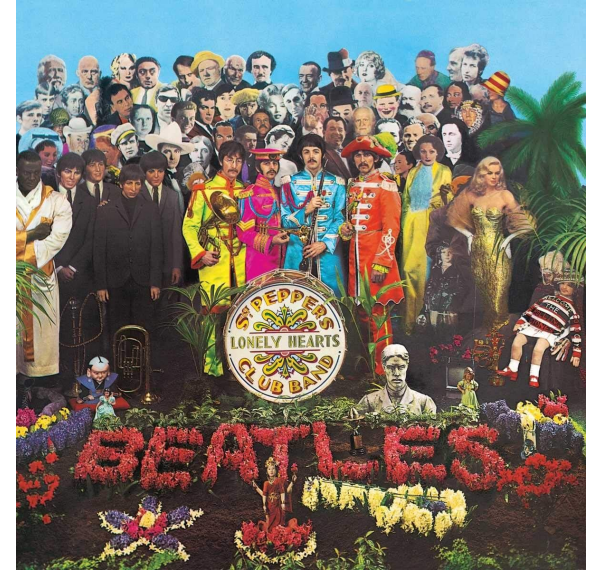
1965   1966   1967

And your competition may push and challenge your brand along the way.

- What is a brand?
- Why and how does a brand change?
- How do you evolve a brand across your digital platforms?

🎶 **I'm picking up good vibrations** 🎶

What is a brand?

What is a brand?

The perceptions or associations people have about your institution. This can align with how you express your brand, or not. It is also:

- Foundational
- Lived
- Tactical
- Costly
- Defined (or undefined)
- Current (or out of date)
- Activated (or dormant)
- Documented (or undocumented)

Higher ed is mission-driven and brand-focused.

Mission and Brand

OHO
INTERACTIVE

Mission

Who you are

What drives you

Brand

How you express your identity and motivations — and how they are perceived

The brand expression on the website should reinforce the mission of the institution.

Why the Mission Matters

➤ **Focuses the work**

  ○ Guides areas of emphasis

➤ **Defines impact and success**

  ○ How we'll know we made a difference

➤ **Shapes the internal culture**

  ○ How the brand lives when no one is looking

🎶 I guess I just wasn't made for these times 🎶

Why and how does a brand change?

A More Nimble Brand

Your brand is alive — let it grow.

"...The guys didn't like [Pet Sounds] ... [They] thought it was like too advanced music. They wanted to keep making car songs and surf songs. I said, 'Guys, we got to grow. We've got to grow musically.'"

Brian Wilson

Brand Refresh

What typically prompts this?

- Evolution of institutional **mission**
- Shift in **priorities,** determined by strategic plan or otherwise
- New program offerings or other shift in **academic focus**
- New target **audience** segments (e.g. online vs. residential)
- Major shifts in the **market**

Brand Refresh

What themes are relevant in the marketplace?
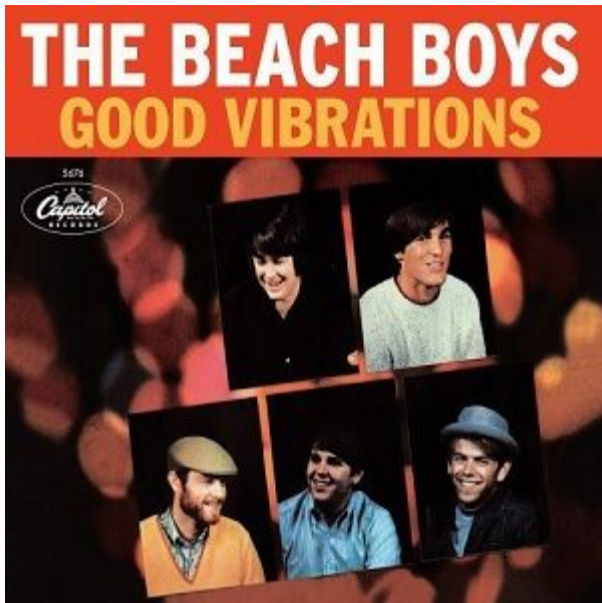
- e.g. social justice, sustainability, STEM

What about your brand and how you exemplify it is relevant to these themes? How do you communicate these qualities?

A More Nimble Brand

The more solidly you define the core of your brand, the more easily you can then extend and apply it across different mediums.

Between its harmonies and subject matter, "Good Vibrations" (1966) has many of the hallmarks of a classic Beach Boys pop song, but it also redefined pop songcraft and brought the band into the psychedelic era.

Your brand may feel massive and intractable.

The brand

Your team

A More Nimble Brand

Circumstances can change quickly. The market is evolving swiftly. Your institution needs to be able to position its brand in response. Smaller brand evolutions can help you do this.

"Beach Boys' Party!" (1965) was quickly recorded and released for the holiday season, just months after their previous studio release. The album's "unplugged" approach and focus on cover songs was innovative at the time, and it bought time for Brian Wilson to finish his masterpiece, "Pet Sounds."

A More Nimble Brand

Occasional, big, expensive brand work vs. ongoing brand evolution & governance
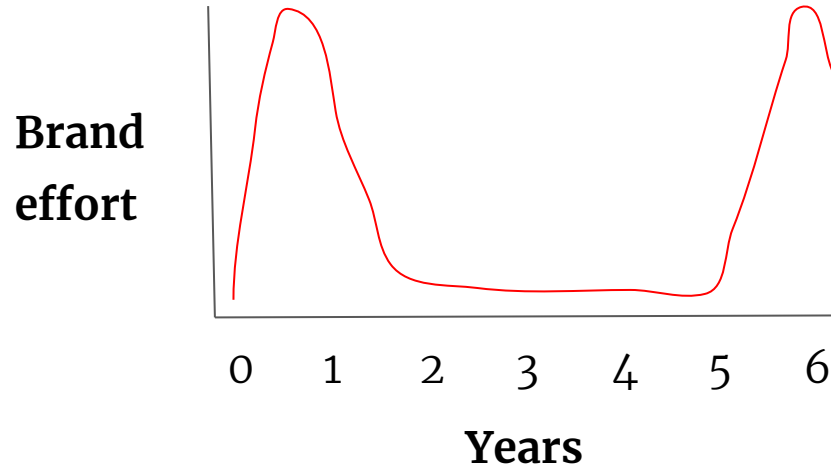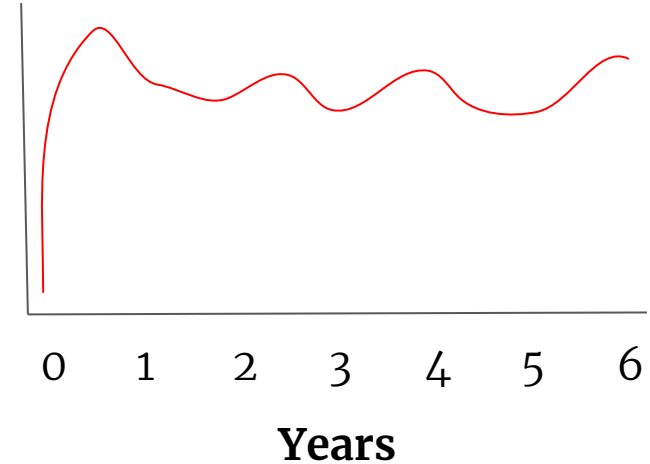
🎶 **Round round, get around, I get around** 🎶

How do you nimbly evolve a brand across your digital platforms?

Brand Discovery

When working with a third-party vendor, brand deliverables — pillars, narrative, messaging, positioning, personality, attributes, etc. — are typically informed through a research process:

Survey Community Broad quantitative intake of brand perceptions and impressions

Engage Key Segments Interviews, focus groups, and/or workshops with key segments to better understand attitudes, preferences, needs, behaviors

Analyze Data Compare across segments and identify notable findings

Brand & Mission

Research — Brand Attributes

The raw material of your brand — the DNA of your pillars, messages, narratives, and positioning.
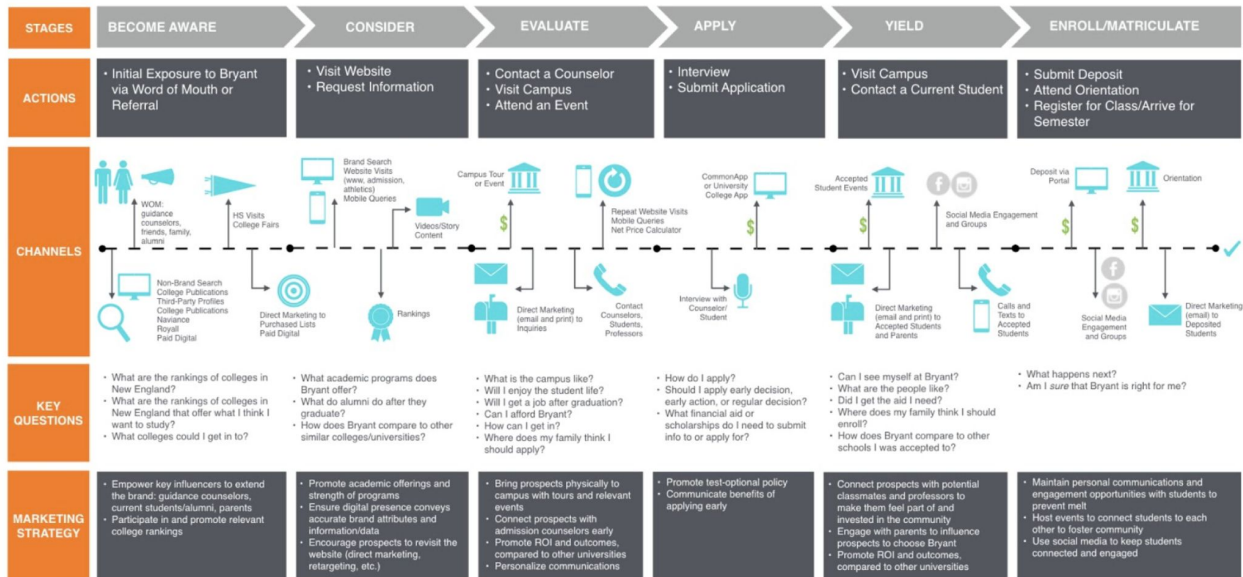
Research — Personas

Understand to whom and how you are presenting your brand.

Research — Customer Journey Map

Understand the work your brand has to do at different touchpoints.

Building Off of Brand Research

- **Revisit your personas and customer journey maps** regularly, ensuring currency and plotting out relevant and reinforcing brand touchpoints
- **Gauge brand content efficacy and impact** and gain buy-in by regularly engaging key audiences through focus groups, surveys, and user testing to assess relevance, accuracy, and effectiveness
- **Tie website analytics to brand questions** — for example, do stories designed to reinforce brand pillars resonate with users? If not, how should the storytelling approach be revisited? Connect brand objectives to specific actions and conversions

The weight of your brand ultimately lies in how it is perceived, not in how you express it.

Measuring User Behavior

Business Objectives	What business goals does your content support?
Marketing Goals	How does your content support your marketing plan, and at what stages in the decision journey (i.e. funnel)?
Audience	Who is your primary audience (pick one)? Who is secondary?
Conversion Goals	What actions do you want people to take?
KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)	What relevant metrics can help measure goals over time?
Targets	How do you rate success?
Segments	What visitor attributes will provide meaningful insights?

Brand & Mission

Engaging Your Audience

Focus group findings: Only 1 in 6 knew there was more to the homepage than the first screen; most did not notice when clicking the anchors on the homepage that they were taken further down the page. (They had to be shown thi~~~

Brand - The ▇▇▇▇▇ name alone conveys **quality**, **trustworthiness**, and **value**. The name says it all. It doesn't have anything to prove.

However, the photography and design needs to connote the following:

- **Authentic** connection to VT
- Authentic photo subjects - VT - **not firing squad**
- **Health related** subject matter for photos

Inspires Confidence in Program

- **Career outcomes information is appealing** and helps to assure potential students that they would be able to find employment with a Business and Management degree from ▇▇▇▇▇

- **Internship opportunities are attractive** to potential students; they feel this helps them gain hands-on experience in their field of study and benefit their career. Student quotes about internships were additionally helpful

- **Info related to employment tested well**; statistics about finding employment within 6 months of graduation indicate the overall quality and value of a ▇▇▇▇▇ degree. Students liked the section highlighting jobs graduates received

- **Information about faculty lends significant credibility**

- **Visitors believe that** ▇▇▇▇▇ **is career-oriented** and that a degree from ▇▇▇▇▇ would pay off and help to advance their career

Focus Group Brand Conclusions

▇▇▇▇▇ **Brand Reigns** – Unless a marketing message completely betrays the brand pillars of the institution, the existing brand associations held by prospects will remain extremely positive.

Convey High Quality – Brand messages should reinforce the school's existing highly regarded and prestigious brand. These should be presented by the positive practical impact the school has within the world of education and in society in general.

Avoid Elitism and Exclusivity – Brand messages that stress exclusivity will fail to appeal to the ▇▇ prospects. They want to be associated with an elite institution, but they don't want the school to be elitist or exclusionary.

Welcoming, Inclusive, and Diverse – Brand messages that highlight the school's commitment to diversity and the positive impact that it has on both the school and society at large are highly regarded by prospects.

Success – Personal and in Wider Contexts – Messages that indicate that there is a high return on personal investment for attending the school and that this investment has a positive impact on society in general are very effective.

Reflect on Digital Brand Expression

Consider key digital brand entry points: Website — Social — Search

- Do we have a clear sense internally of how to communicate our brand?
- Are we elevating the right qualities of our programs?
- Are we telling stories that engage people in an impact narrative and motivate further engagement?
- Are we reflecting our community authentically, thereby providing a true window into our experience?
- Are we reducing transactional friction to allow for deeper brand immersion?
- Is the brand appropriately reinforced along the prospective student journey?

Brand Activation via Content Strategy

Topics	What types of stories or information best reinforce these messages?
Style, voice & tone	How should we digitally convey brand through language and visuals? How do we best extend brand guidelines to inform this approach?
Format & types	What publication formats and content types (e.g. stats/infographics, videos, photos, testimonials) best convey these messages?
Distribution	How should we publish, distribute, and promote content to maximize visibility and comprehension and reinforce relevant action?

Message Architecture

An outline or hierarchy of communication goals and high-level messaging pillars, intended to inform content and design assets.

A message architecture is defined through a brand attribute card-sorting exercise — you can revisit this exercise as needs arise to ensure alignment.

The pillars can be plugged into your editorial planning process to focus content decisions relating to content themes, taxonomy, and other priorities.
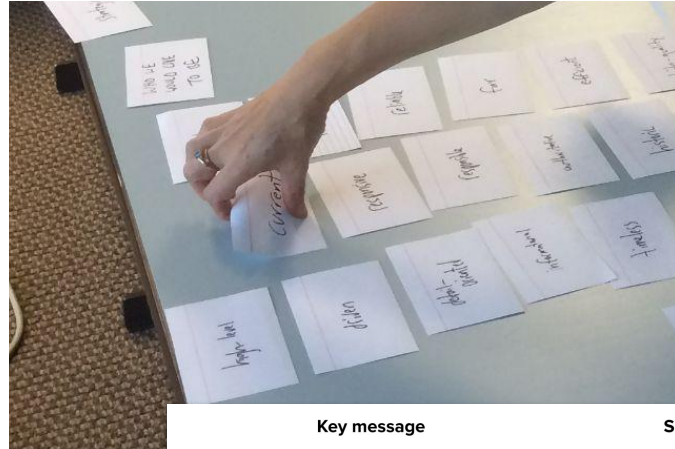
Key message	Supporting themes
Always forward-looking, always relevant	• Future-focused and growth-minded — not content to rest on past accomplishments • Dynamic leadership through clear vision and bold action • Embracing innovation in all forms • Strategically responsive to emerging needs and trends

Editorial Planning

Include columns for key messages and tags in your editorial calendar to see the balance of themes over time and ensure appropriate representation in your content — including both written and visual (photo & video) content.

	STORY	DATE SCHEDULED	STATUS	WRITER	PHOTO/VIDEO	EDITOR	MAJOR ANNOU	THEME 1	THEME 2	THEME 3	TAG 1	TAG 2
1	STORY	DATE SCHEDULED	STATUS	WRITER	PHOTO/VIDEO	EDITOR	MAJOR ANNOU	THEME 1	THEME 2	THEME 3	TAG 1	TAG 2
2	Lorem ipsum d	4/15/2021		Jane	Rob	Barbara	TRUE	TRUE			TRUE	
3	Consectetur ad	4/16/2021		Alicia	Matt	Barbara			TRUE			TRUE
4	Sed do eiusmod	4/17/2021		Fred	Courtney	Kimiko				TRUE		
5	Incididunt ut lal	4/18/2021		Alicia	Courtney	Fred	TRUE					
6	Dolore magna ali	4/19/2021		Fred	Matt	Barbara		TRUE			TRUE	
7	Ut enim ad min	4/20/2021		Jane	n/a	Fred			TRUE			
8	Duis aute irure	4/21/2021		Jane	Rob	Kimiko		TRUE				
9	Excepteur sint	4/22/2021		Fred	n/a	Barbara			TRUE		TRUE	
10	Sed ut perspicii	4/23/2021		Jane	Courtney	Alicia	TRUE			TRUE		
11	Neque porro qu	4/24/2021		Barbara	Courtney	Barbara				TRUE		
12	Ut enim ad min	4/25/2021		Kimiko	Matt	Barbara		TRUE		TRUE		

Voice & Tone

Voice is **who you are**. It remains consistent.

Tone is **attitude**. It changes with context.

The voice of web content should reflect that of an advisor — approachable, helpful, clear, direct, empathetic, detail-oriented.

- **Authentic and human**
  - Warm, inclusive, welcoming, approachable, conversational, personal
  - Prioritize use of first-person plural and second person
  - Show empathy by validating user feelings and addressing user needs
  - Use conversational language (we, you) & contractions ("won't" vs. "will not")
- **Clear and accessible**
  - Be concise, simple diction & syntax, low use of jargon, idioms, and acronyms
  - Maintain no higher than Grade 9 readability level
  - Avoid dense, complex blocks of copy that can alienate a reader
- **Empowering and affirming**
  - Use active voice and bold, dynamic, action-oriented verbs — discover, choose, do, find, get, seek, search, create, make, define
  - Be genuine; share differentiating facts about the college but don't make unsupported claims; avoid hyperbole; use citations and references

We are...	Approach
Supportive	- Balance attention to user needs and promoting offerings but not presuming intentions/desires ("we're the best fit for you") – validate user feelings, then inform, help, and enlighten - Emphasize connections and collaborations — be advisory, consultative, and service-oriented

We are...	Approach
Motivating	- Be encouraging, not commanding or instructive; empower, don't "fix" - Convey activity, vibrancy, opportunity - Showcase individual accomplishments to reflect success of community - Write with warmth and humanity — do not be sanctimonious or self-righteous

- Determine how your tone may flex in response to different brand needs.
- Confirm that your voice remains true to the core of your brand

The Role of Visual Design

- Illustrate and reinforce key brand qualities
- Interpret and extend key brand elements by establishing meaningful patterns within a consistent design system
- In the case of a subordinate unit (e.g. school within a university), establish affiliation to parent unit while defining a distinct identity
- Buoy a sustainable content strategy with engaging interactions and visual appeal
- Help institution stand out against peers and competitors
- Ensure accessibility compliance and efficient site performance

The Role of Visual Design

A creative concepting workshop is a collaborative opportunity to review your visual brand expression to ensure it aligns to digital best practices and is the most forward-facing representation of your visual brand identity.

The Role of Visual Design

Regularly examine your site in the context of your peers and competitors to understand the decisions they are making and how that might inform your own brand decisions.
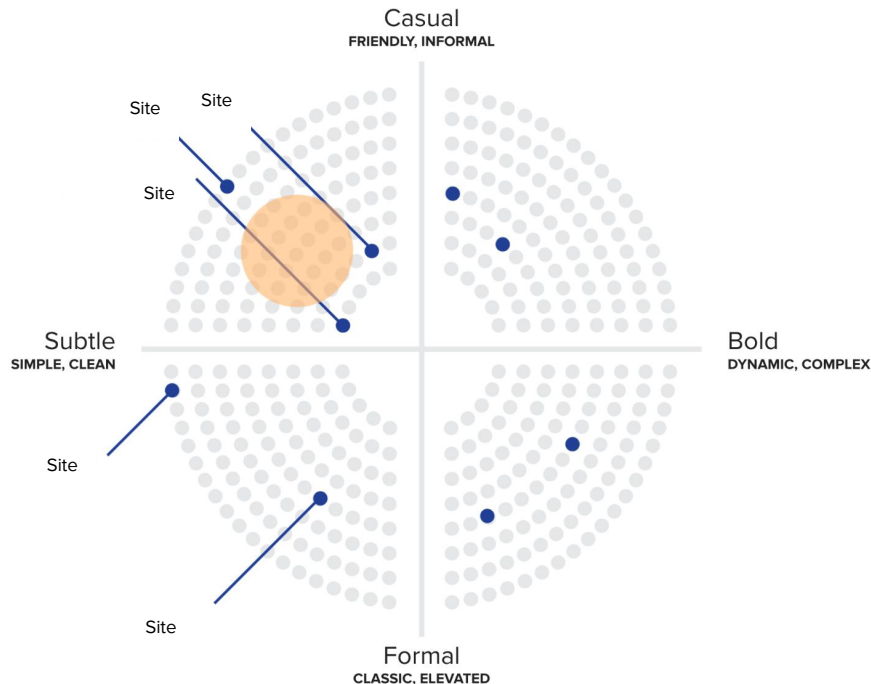
The Role of Visual Design

Design patterns reinforce the brand while creating a consistent visual language that builds confidence among users. Maintaining a pattern library enables easier iterative design evolution.

The Role of Visual Design

The Role of Visual Design

User Interface Elements

Buttons and icons are functional and vital design elements that contribute to the overall clarity of a website's content by aiding the user's exploration and consumption of content. Below are the established styles and colors used for buttons and icons.

Primary Buttons

YELLOW BUTTON
For use on white or blue backgrounds

Raleway Bold 12px; #000; letterspacing: 1; all caps

BLUE BUTTON
For use on gray backgrounds

Raleway Bold 12px; #FFF; letterspacing: 1; all caps

News & Media Icons

WHITE ICON SAMPLES
Primary News & Media Component

News   Events   In the news   Blog

Icon Width: 32px

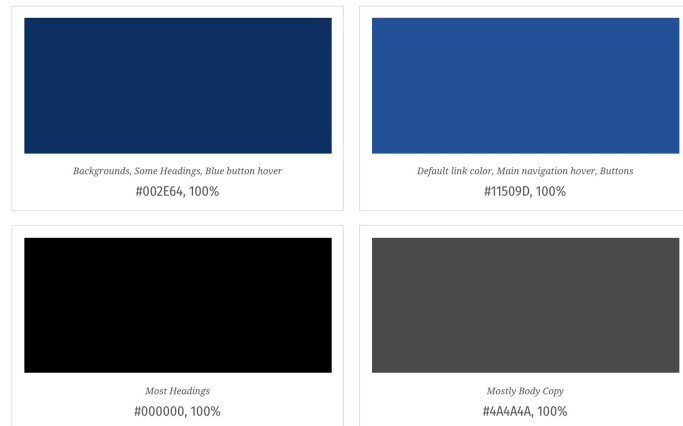**BLUE ICON SAMPLES**
Simple News & Media Component

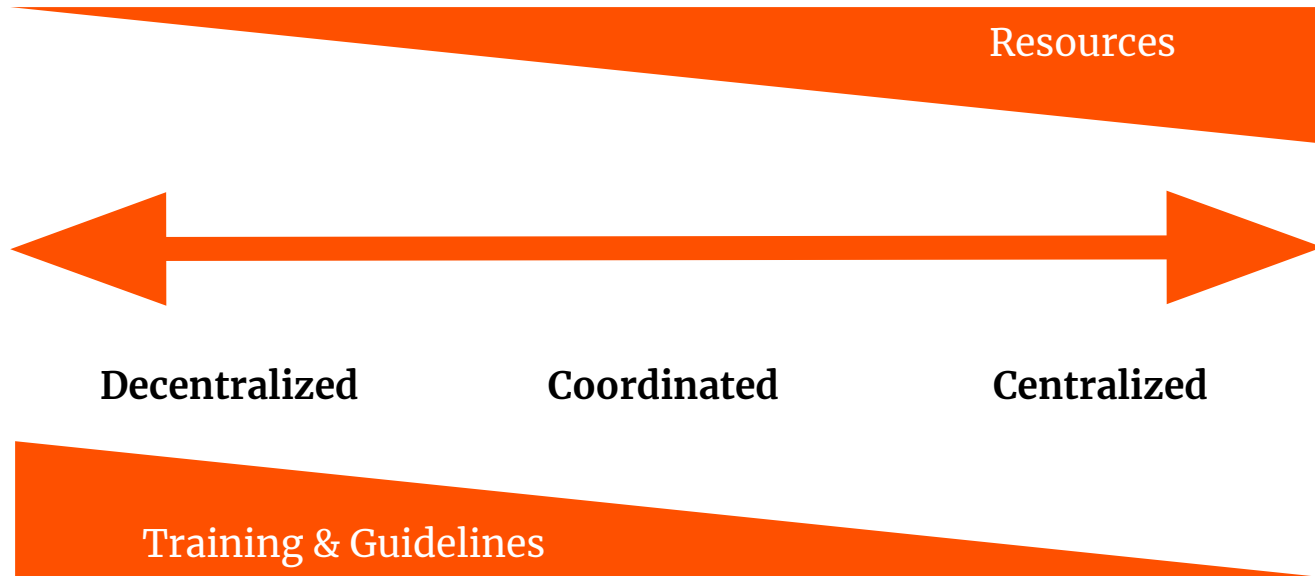News   In the news

Icon Width: 32px

Colors

The following colors are based on the primary color palette from the NWC Branding Guide. They have been converted to HEX code values for use on the web.

Primary Colors

Backgrounds, Some Headings, Blue button hover
#002E64, 100%

Default link color, Main navigation hover, Buttons
#11509D, 100%

Most Headings
#000000, 100%

Mostly Body Copy
#4A4A4A, 100%

Brand Governance

Once you define a brand identity, how do you ensure ongoing alignment?

Resources

Decentralized **Coordinated** **Centralized**

Training & Guidelines

🎶 Don't worry, baby, everything will turn out alright 🎶

"When I sang the lyric for the first time to Brian [Wilson], I was singing 'oh, Carol, I know'. I had in mind a song in which the girl [was] trying to explain to the former lover the inevitability or maybe the unavoidability of growing up. ... Brian, understandably, heard it as "Caroline, No" which struck me as a far more interesting line than the one I originally had in mind.

Tony Asher
Co-songwriter, "Caroline, No"

Thanks!

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🐦 @radiofreegeorgy

OHO U