The 2019
**State of
Higher Ed
Marketing**

Contents

The Study's Purpose

→ Gather data on the state of marketing in higher ed

→ Establish industry benchmarks

→ Evaluate the pace of growth of our industry

→ Identify trends and hot topics

→ Understand goals, responsibilities, and measurement techniques

→ Track our industry as it matures

Report Legend

D **Doctoral-Granting University**

M **Master's College or University**

B **Baccalaureate College**

Key Insight

Student

FTE Staff

Methodology

→ Results obtained by input from 270 respondents.

→ All respondents work for a 4-year, nonprofit institution in the United States.

→ All respondents are senior officers who oversee marketing and communications and work within a central marketing/communications office.

→ Only one respondent per institution was used in our survey. In instances where multiple officials responded from the same institution, we used only the most senior official.

	Doctoral	Master's	Baccalaureate
2014 n=[268]	37%	35%	28%
2016 n=[298]	44%	30%	26%
2019	46%	27%	28%

AVERAGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS

Doctoral
16,007

Master's
5,107

Baccalaureate
4,128

Private or **Public** Institution?

51% | 49%

68% | 32%

75% | 25%

Marketing's Role in Higher Ed Leadership

Not all lead marketers are part of institutional leadership.

→ Doctoral and Master's institutions are more likely to have lead marketer in a VP role, while Baccalaureate institutions are more likely to have them in a director role.

→ Lead marketer salaries vary by title more so than by institution type, with VPs compensated at a higher rate than their counterparts in the director role.

→ Large majority of lead marketers are involved in discussions around promotion and recruitment, but fewer are involved in other discussions that significantly impact enrollment goals like program development and pricing.

48%

of respondents report
directly to the president/
chancellor

56%

of respondents are
members of cabinet/
executive leadership team

43%

of respondents report directly
to the president/chancellor
and are members of cabinet/
executive leadership team

2014   2016   2019

Do you report directly to the president/chancellor of your institution?

% Yes

- 2014: 41% 53% 53%
- 2016: 39% 47% 47%
- 2019: 46% 43% 55%

Are you a member of the president's cabinet/ executive leadership team (or equivalent)?

% Yes

- 2014: 54% 60% 59%
- 2016: 44% 56% 60%
- 2019: 54% 57% 57%

Lead Marketer Salary

Doctoral

Mean
$175,148

Max
$365,000

Median
$130,000

Min
$70,000

Master's

Mean
$170,286

Max
$340,000

Median
$123,000

Min
$97,000

Baccalaureate

Mean
$156,636

Max
$375,000

Median
$100,000

Min
$80,000

2019 Title Categorization

	D	M	B
C-Suite	7%	14%	16%
Vice President	49%	50%	34%
Director	37%	32%	46%
Other			

Legend:
- C-Suite
- Vice President
- Director
- Other

Salary Ranges by Title

Vice President Mean

$175,148

Min
$70,000

Max
$365,000

C-Suite Mean

$156,636

Min
$80,000

Max
$375,000

Director Mean

$87,656

Min
$50,000

Max
$165,000

Marketing's Role

As the lead marketer at my institution, I am involved in discussions regarding:

Legend: Total | D | M | B

Marketing of individual schools (colleges, departments, and units)	Recruitment strategy	Student experience	Diversity/ inclusion initiatives	Employee morale	Alumni relations strategy	Fundraising strategy	Program/ product development	Retention	Athletics marketing	Board management	Pricing/tuition strategy
91%	86%	63%	63%	56%	55%	53%	51%	48%	44%	35%	35%

As the lead marketer at my institution, I am involved in discussions regarding:

Promotion & Placement	Product	Pricing	Institutional Leadership

Marketing of individual schools (colleges, departments, and units) — 91%

Recruitment strategy — 86%, 35%

Student experience — 63%

Diversity/ inclusion initiatives — 63%

Employee morale — 56%

Alumni relations strategy — 55%

Fundraising strategy — 53%

Program/ product development — 51%

Retention — 48%

Athletics marketing — 44%

Board management — 35%

Pricing/tuition strategy — 35%

Section 3 /
Budget & Resources

Know your budget & manage your expectations.

→ Marketing department budgets vary significantly both within and across institution types.

→ More than 3 in 4 lead marketers say their department does not have the budget needed to meet expectations of leadership.

→ More than 1 in 4 say their department's budget has increased, but almost as many say it has decreased. Half of respondents say their budgets haven't changed.

→ Twenty percent of lead marketers don't know or aren't able to estimate their own department's budget.

2019 Overall Department Budget

Doctoral

Mean	Median
$3,430,156	**$2.5M**

Max	
$12,000,000	

Min	Don't Know or Can't Estimate
$455,800	**15%**

Master's

Mean	Median
$1,730,611	**$1.6M**

Max	
$4,200,000	

Min	Don't Know or Can't Estimate
$300,000	**21%**

Baccalaureate

Mean	Median
$1,139,868	**$1.0M**

Max	
$3,700,000	

Min	Don't Know or Can't Estimate
$150,000	**20%**

Marketing Budget as a Percentage of Institutional Budget

🏛 Doctoral

Mean	Median
1.39%	**0.85**%
Max	
11.67%	
Min	
0.05%	

🏛 Master's

Mean	Median
2.00%	**1.63**%
Max	
9.06%	
Min	
0.48%	

🏛 Baccalaureate

Mean	Median
2.39%	**1.67**%
Max	
15.00%	
Min	
0.27%	

Change in Marketing Department Budget in Last Year

Gaps = don't know

29%
Increase

48%
Stayed
the Same

22%
Decrease

D
Doctoral

43%
Stayed
the Same

31%
Increase

26%
Decrease

M
Master's

26%
Increase

50%
Stayed
the Same

21%
Decrease

B
Baccalaureate

Our marketing department has the budget needed to meet the expectations of leadership—<u>agree</u> or <u>disagree</u>?

■ **Strongly Disagree**   ■ **Disagree**   ■ **Agree**   ■ **Strongly Agree**   Gaps = don't know

Total — 42%, 37%

Doctoral — 38%, 40%

Master's — 44%, 38%

Baccalaureate — 45%, 30%

✎ Strongly Disagree/Disagree

79%   78%   82%   75%

Section 4 /

Marketing Department

Optimize the size of your marketing team with the needs of your institution.

→ There was little to no change in the mean number of full-time marketing department employees since 2016.

→ However, more than one-third of institutions have increased the number of employees in the last year.

→ More than half of the respondents reported they currently have open positions to fill.

→ More than 3 in 4 marketers do not have the staff they need to meet the expectations of leadership.

→ Most marketing departments use freelancers monthly and freelance support is most often used for graphic design, photography, copywriting, and video.

Average Number of Full-Time Employees

	2014	2016	2019
D	24	26	24
M	12	12	10
B	10	8	9

How many positions do you have open or are you trying to fill right now?

0
45%

1-4
51%

Legend:
- 0
- 1-4
- 5-9
- 10+

How has the total number of employees in your department changed in the last year?

38%
Increased

49%
Stayed the Same

13%
Decreased

Our marketing department has the staff needed to meet the expectations of leadership—agree or disagree?

■ **Strongly Disagree**　■ **Disagree**　■ **Agree**　■ **Strongly Agree**　　Gaps = don't know

Total
38%
39%

Doctoral — D
40%
36%

Master's — M
38%
44%

Baccalaureate — B
34%
37%

✎ Strongly Disagree/Disagree

77%　76%　82%　71%

"

Do you regularly use freelancers to support your department?

Of those who regularly use freelancers, 73% use 1-4 freelancers in a typical month.

70% Yes

- 10+
- 5 TO 9
- 1 TO 4
- 0

Total
4%
21%
73%

Doctoral
6%
22%
71%

Master's
5%
17%
78%

Baccalaureate
26%
72%

Metrics, Objectives, Priorities & Effectiveness

Assess the success of your marketing efforts.

→ Almost all lead marketers agree that strengthening their institution's reputation is a fundamental driver behind their long-term goals.

→ Most lead marketers say their brand extends to all colleges, schools, and departments within their institution.

→ While a majority of lead marketers grade the effectiveness of their department as a B (59%), approximately the same number grade themselves an A (21%) as a C or D (20%).

→ Lead marketers who rate their departments as an A or B have more staff and use more freelancers, but don't necessarily have larger budgets than those assessing their departments a C or D.

→ Those with A rating are more likely than the average to report increases in enrollment, giving, and reputation.

Assess the success of your marketing efforts.

→ Majority say their president uses undergraduate enrollment to measure success, but an alarming percentage report that success is measured by anecdotal opinions.

→ More marketers say their president relies on anecdotal opinions than many quantifiable measures. Only 1 in 3 are using periodic brand tracking to measure success.

→ Only 1 in 3 say the president uses measurements of brand strength as a metric of success.

→ 3 in 4 lead marketers say their institution has a documented brand strategy—a significant increase from 2016.

→ While most institutions have brand strategy in place, few are regularly reporting key metrics to leadership.

"

Strengthening
and protecting the
institution's reputation is a
fundamental driver behind
our long-term goals.

96% agree

"

Our brand extends
to all colleges, schools,
and departments within
our institution.

88% agree

Visual Identity Guidelines

99%
Yes

Brand Guidelines

93%
Yes

Documented Brand Strategy

77%
Yes

In 2016, only 66% of respondents reported having a written/documented brand strategy

Brand research conducted in the last 3 years

73%
Yes

Regular report of overall marketing productivity (at least annually)

70%
Yes

Regular reporting of digital analytics to leadership (at least quarterly)

64%
Yes

Cross-divisional marketing team or task force that meets regularly

59%
Yes

Top metrics used by the president or chancellor to gauge the success and impact of the marketing department:

Metric	%
Number and Quality of Undergraduate Students Enrolling	69%
Anecdotal Opinions of Reputation	57%
Amount/Quality of Media Coverage	50%
Social Media Engagement	49%
Web Analytics	44%
Number and Quality of Graduate Students Enrolling	40%
Yield Rate from Applicant Pool	39%
Fundraising Productivity	36%
Improvements in Rankings	34%
Measurements of Brand Strength	32%
Alumni Engagement	25%
Other	8%

Majority say their president uses UG enrollment to measure success, but an alarming percentage report that success is measured by anecdotal opinions.

Self-Reported Marketing Effectiveness Assessments

The mean grade level for institution's overall marketing effectiveness over the last 3 years is between a B and B+, grades ranged from a D to A+

GRADE
A
21%

Marketing Budget per Enrolled Student
$623 /

Institutional Budget per Enrolled Student
$40,322 /

Reported UG
Enrollment Increase
51%

Reported Grad
Enrollment Increase
42%

Staff Size
21

Use Freelancers
71%

Reported Annual
Fund Giving Increase
78%

Reported Strength of
Reputation Increase
75%

GRADE
B
59%

Marketing Budget per Enrolled Student
$429 /

Institutional Budget per Enrolled Student
$35,550 /

Reported UG
Enrollment Increase
39%

Reported Grad
Enrollment Increase
36%

Staff Size
16

Use Freelancers
75%

Reported Annual
Fund Giving Increase
52%

Reported Strength of
Reputation Increase
48%

GRADE
C
OR
D
20%

Marketing Budget per Enrolled Student
$463 /

Institutional Budget per Enrolled Student
$34,403 /

Reported UG
Enrollment Increase
19%

Reported Grad
Enrollment Increase
18%

Staff Size
11

Use Freelancers
56%

Reported Annual
Fund Giving Increase
39%

Reported Strength of
Reputation Increase
19%

Section 6 /

Digital & Traditional Advertising

Recognize your needs for both digital and traditional advertising.

→ More than 2 in 3 institutions increased digital advertising spend, while only 15% increased traditional advertising spend.

→ While a significant number of marketers say they have decreased their budget for traditional ad spending, just as many say their budget hasn't changed.

→ The mean for traditional ad budgets are not far below the mean for digital ad budgets, but the range across all institution types varies greatly.

Amount Spent on Digital Advertising

Doctoral

Mean

$377,136

Median
$200,000

Master's

Mean

$198,552

Median
$135,000

Baccalaureate

Mean

$103,377

Median
$60,000

Amount Spent on Traditional Advertising

Doctoral

Mean

$233,790

Median
$120,000

Master's

Mean

$173,250

Median
$122,500

Baccalaureate

Mean

$74,263

Median
$200,000

Budget Spending Changes

Digital advertising buying	Traditional advertising buying	Website design, development, and support	Creating content for web, digital, social, and video channels	Spending on marketing technology/software
63%	15%	39%	47%	39%
28%	42%	51%	48%	56%
7%	42%	9%	4%	4%

Legend:
- Increased
- Stayed the Same
- Decreased
- Don't Know

Primary Objectives of Advertising

Undergraduate Enrollment	81%
Increase Awareness	79%
Shape or Change Perceptions	54%
Graduate Enrollment	51%

Calls-to-action included in advertising:

79% Apply now

77% Click to visit a targeted landing page

72% Schedule a visit

Advertising as a Percentage of Total Marketing Budget

Doctoral

22.3%
Mean

Master's

24.7%
Mean

Baccalaureate

18.3%
Mean

Advertising as a Percentage of Total Marketing Budget

8.2%

of department budget
spent on digital ad
placement (mean)

Median **5.2**%

12.0%

of department budget
spent on traditional ad
placement (mean)

Median **7.6**%

57%

of respondents say their
institution spends more on
traditional ad placement
than digital ad placement

Section 7 /

Keeping Up With Digital Trends

Print is still a player, but digital must be a focus.

→ Most institutions haven't abandoned print viewbooks. Nearly half produce both print and digital, and 3 in 4 produce only print versions.

→ Most institutions produce both print and digital versions of their alumni magazine.

→ The two main players for Content Management System (CMS) solutions are Drupal and WordPress.

→ Nearly half of institutions use Slate as their Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solution.

→ Only one in three institutions currently integrate their CMS with their CRM.

→ 49% of respondents have completed a comprehensive redesign of their primary institutional website within the past two years.

What is produced via print, digital, both, or not at all?

Print · Digital · Both · Not at All

Undergraduate Viewbook
- Print: 40%
- Digital: 5%
- Both: 47%
- Not at All: 8%

Annual Report
- Print: 13%
- Digital: 8%
- Both: 37%
- Not at All: 42%

Alumni Magazine
- Print: 15%
- Digital: 3%
- Both: 76%
- Not at All: 6%

Newsletter for Internal Audiences
- Print: 1%
- Digital: 78%
- Both: 7%
- Not at All: 14%

Top Content Management System Solution

WordPress   25%
Drupal   24%

Other Players:

OmniUpdate	12%
Cascade	11%
Terminal4	3%
Ektron	2%
Big Tree	2%
Ingeniux	1%
Other	17%

If Drupal, what version?
30% 7.X **54**% 8.X **16**% Not Sure

Don't Know
3%

Top Customer Relationship Management Solution

Slate   47%

Other Players:

Salesforce	11%
Ellucian	9%
TargetX	9%
Hubspot	1%
Other	13%

Don't Have a CRM
4%

Don't Know
2%

32[%]
Yes

Do you currently
integrate your CMS
with your CRM?

35[%]
Yes

If you do not
already, do you plan
to integrate your CMS
with your CRM in the
next year?

When was the last comprehensive redesign of your primary institutional website?

Less Than a Year Ago — 22%

1-2 Years Ago — 27%

3-5 Years — 36%

More Than 5 Years — 15%

49% of respondents have completed a comprehensive redesign of their primary institutional website within the past two years.

Section 9 /

The Questions We're Asking

The Questions We're Asking

❝ Is marketing communications in higher ed stagnating or getting stronger? What are the ways that it can be improved?

❝ Most institutions have documented brand strategies in place. But are we making progress in how we measure impact? What is to be measured?

❝ Who matters when making the case for effectiveness? The president or chancellor? Your board? Faculty? Someone else?

❝ Technology has already disrupted higher ed. Do you have a roadmap in place to align your strategies with the technology needed to support them?

❝ Given the reported constraints on resources, alongside unfunded priorities with undefined goals, is it really worth spending any money on advertising?

Our intention in posing these questions is to ensure that this study is not seen as a static document, but rather the continual evolution of a tool — one that acts as a leverage point, a source of accountability, and a springboard calibrated to advancing the entire industry forward.

We encourage you to share this study with your peers, your institutional leadership, and with the next generation of higher ed marketers. Use it to have difficult conversations, to reassess priorities, to fight for more resources.

We also invite your feedback, not just to these questions posed, but to the pressing questions left in your mind after sorting through the research. Are we asking the right questions? Where should we go deeper? What other data are needed to help strengthen the marketing function across campuses nationwide?

The ethos of SimpsonScarborough is to follow where the data lead, which — as we all know — starts with asking the right questions.

Email us your thoughts, insights, and questions at **CMOStudy@SimpsonScarborough.com**

On behalf of our Alexandria, Oakland, and Columbus offices,

Thank you.