
Dominican University

Messaging and Voice Guide



2019-2020

The Purpose

This document offers guidance for crafting content when you're communicating about Dominican University and its offers. In these pages, you'll find information about audiences, messaging and personality traits, as well as sample copy and an elevator speech. Our goal is to give you the tools to share the Dominican story consistently and compellingly.

Why does this matter? Telling a consistent story will help strengthen Dominican's competitive position, raise awareness, enhance our ability to attain philanthropic gifts, and unify our community.

Need help?

Reach out with questions to:

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Section 1

Messaging Strategy

Overview

Simply put, the messaging strategy sets the foundation for the Dominican University brand.

The strategy *is*:

- A useful resource for anyone who communicates on Dominican's behalf
- A set of frameworks and tools created specifically for our marketers and communicators
- A foundation for the ideas, stories and messages that will resonate with our audiences, today and tomorrow
- A group of differentiated, enduring ideas to inspire external-facing messages

The strategy *isn't*:

- An outward expression of the brand (taglines, slogans, and the like)
- A collection of frameworks for external use
- A creative platform or campaign

Strategy Elements

Audiences



Who we're talking to and what we're trying to achieve

Positioning



Who we are and why we matter

Messaging



The key ideas we need to communicate

Personality



How our communications look, feel, and sound

Audiences

To create communications that resonate, we must first identify the audience and the goal we're seeking to achieve.

In general, the brand must meet the needs of four key audience segments.



Positioning

Our positioning statement represents the impression we want to create among our audiences. It's how we want them to think about us, especially in comparison to our peers.

It answers four key questions:

- **Who are we?**
- **What do we deliver?**
- **How do we deliver it?**
- **Why does it matter?**

Here's the Dominican positioning statement:

Who: We're a diverse, ambitious, and deeply engaged community...

What: that empowers each person to develop the vision and drive to find and advance in a meaningful career...

How: through a balance of academic rigor and radical support...

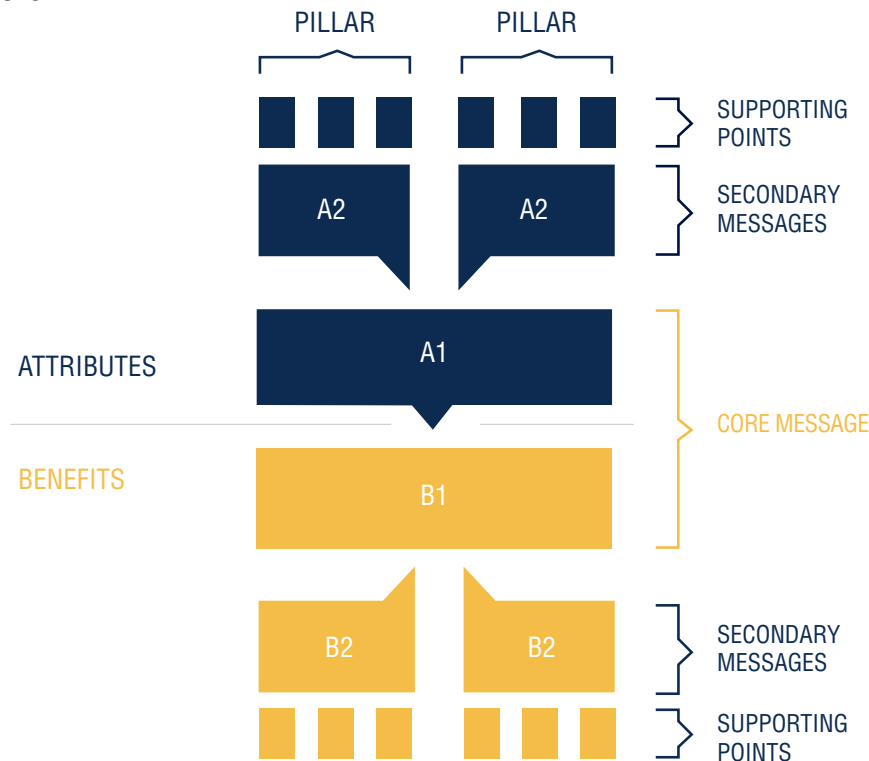
Why: because of our commitment to Dominican Catholic values.

Note: When you're crafting communications, keep this statement in the back of your mind. Does your copy reflect and reinforce this positioning?

Message Map

Now that we know how we want our audiences to think of us, let's dive in to the actual ideas we'll use to convey that position. To do this, we'll use a framework called a message map.

The message map organizes our key ideas into a hierarchy, to help us consistently tell our brand story in a way that's unique and compelling. Each point supports the next, and they all tie directly back to the core.



ATTRIBUTES AND BENEFITS

A compelling brand story is based on attributes and benefits

Attributes are what we offer to our audiences. These include the programs, services, research opportunities and unique offers that we bring to the table

Benefits are what our audiences get. They're the value of the attributes that we offer. They're the answer to the question "so what?" or "why do they care?"

HIERARCHY

The map itself has several layers, each with an increasing amount of detail.

- The value proposition (our core message: high-level and differentiating)
- The secondary messages (our secondary attributes and benefits)
- The supporting points: specific ways that we deliver on our secondary messages (these are flexible and will evolve over time)

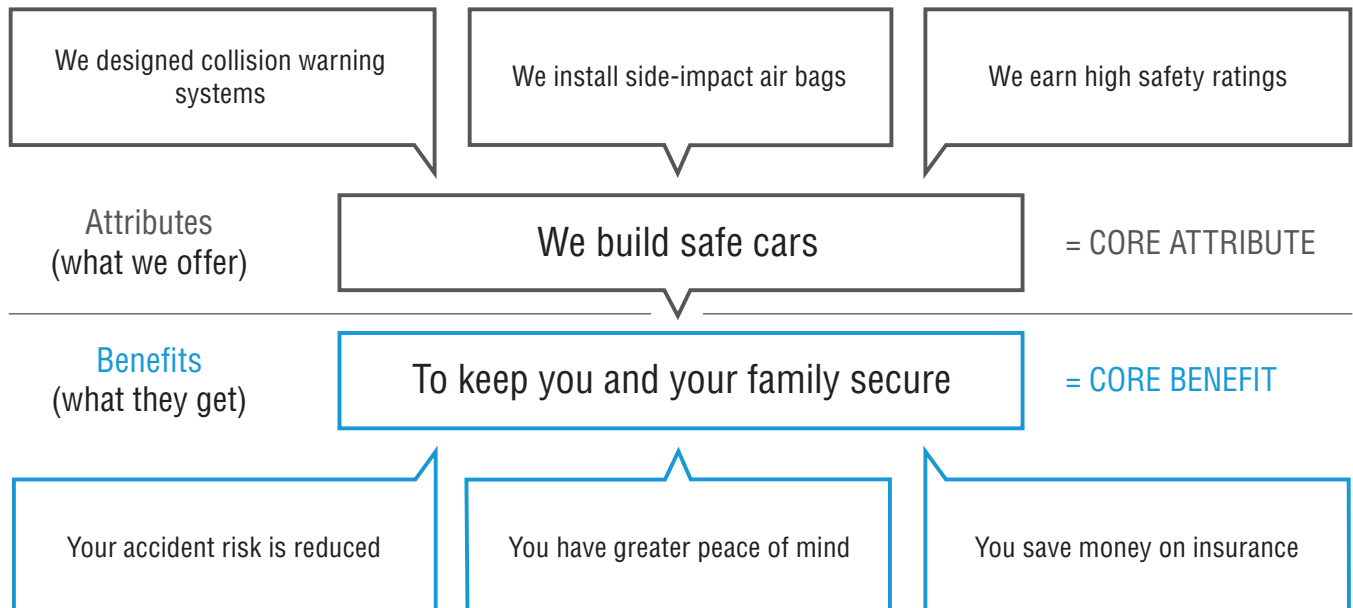
PILLARS

The pillars organize the ideas in the map under three main topics: academics, community and culture, and impact. These three pillars guide how we talk about what we offer our audiences, what differentiates us from our peers, and who our community is.

Example Message Map

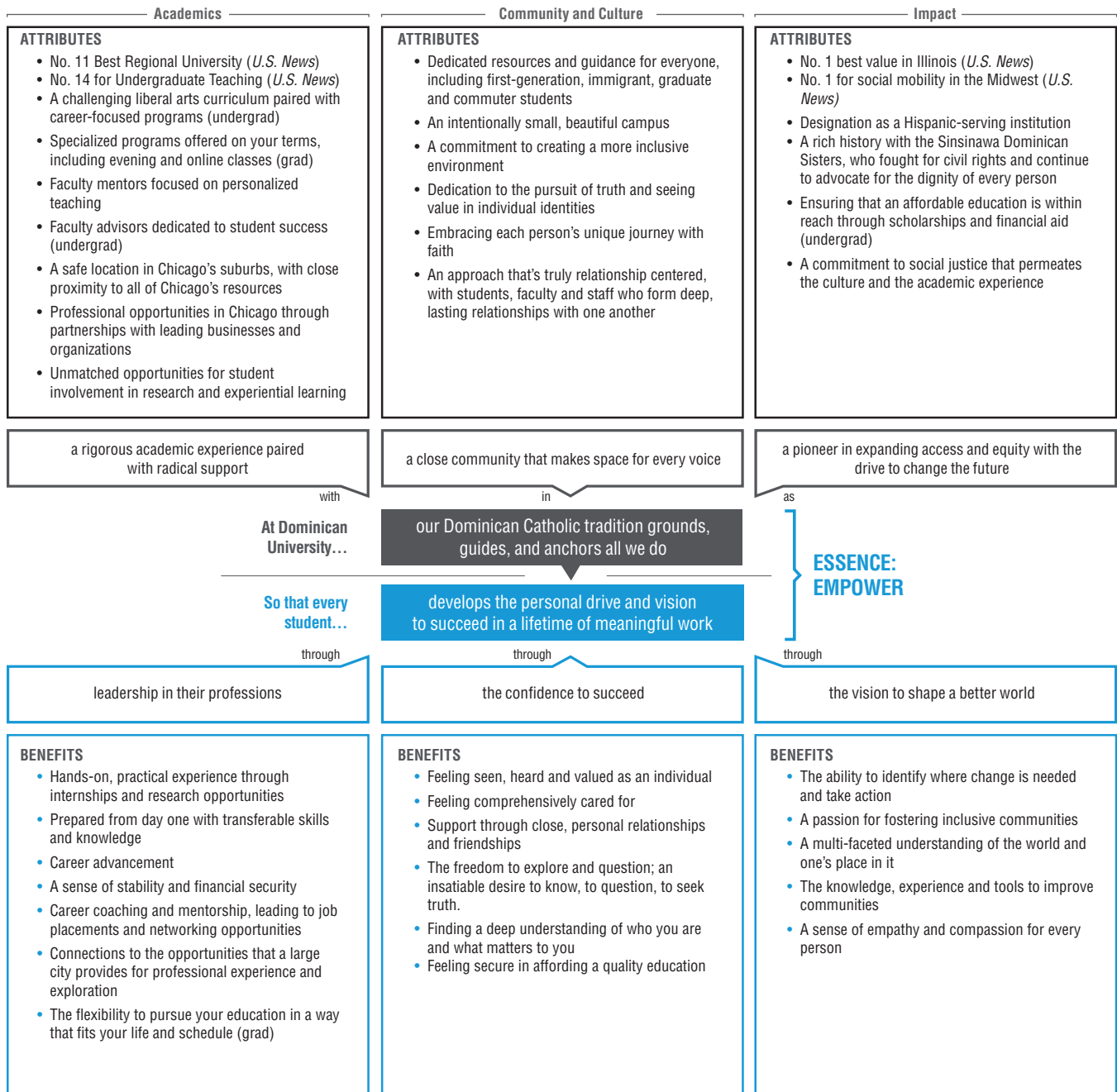
To help get you comfortable with this tool, here's a sample message map for Volvo. We all know Volvo stands for safety — here's an example of the messages the company might use to communicate that idea to its audiences.

Example: **VOLVO**



Message Map + Proof Points

Here is Dominican's message map, which you'll use to communicate the Dominican story. It's a great place to start when you're crafting any communication on behalf of the university. We've included certain messages that are more important to undergraduate and graduate audiences, knowing that we need messaging variations for each of those audience groups.



How to Use the Message Map

Our message map is a hierarchy for selecting messages, but it's not the starting point for crafting content. To get the most out of the map, follow these four steps.



STEP 1

Determine your audience and objective.

Figure out who you're talking to before you decide what to say. People won't care what you have to say, unless you say what they care to hear.



STEP 2

Determine the attribute.

Consult the message map to align your topic with specific attributes. When possible, connect supporting points with a secondary message to strengthen your message.



HELPFUL HINT

Try using the message map to determine the best angle for crafting a story. Look for an opportunity to frame the story through the lens of one of the secondary message points.



STEP 3

Determine the benefit.

Once you've established that your topic links to a brand attribute, you need to identify the benefit or benefits.

(Note: In most cases, your audience cares more about the benefit than the attribute.)



STEP 4

Craft your message.

You may have found one benefit, or you may have found several. You'll want to narrow your focus to the most important benefit—that's what you need to get across first. Any supporting benefits should act as talking points, complemented by the attributes of the topic you are promoting.

Articulating Key Ideas

As part of telling this evolved Dominican story, we want to highlight some key offers. Here's how we can communicate about them, clearly and compellingly.

	The new approach	How it could sound
Liberal arts and the academic tradition	It's important to emphasize that the liberal arts serve as a core foundation, preparing students for success, no matter their path. This approach, paired with our standout programs, makes for an unparalleled education.	At Dominican, we believe you should be ready for anything. Our liberal arts core prepares you to think critically and question everything. You'll learn to investigate the intersections between academic disciplines and across career paths—skills that will help you no matter what you do next.
Catholic Identity	Since “Catholic” as a term can be misunderstood, it should be paired with “Dominican” to create context.	Our Dominican Catholic tradition informs all we do, whether it's our deep commitment to social justice or our excellent academic curriculum.
Diversity	Diversity isn't something we can tell as much as show. Let's put the emphasis more on inclusion, while still being clear and proud about our HSI designation.	At Dominican, every voice matters. We ensure that our students feel welcome and valued, and we're especially proud of our designation as a Hispanic-serving institution.
Affordability	Cost should not be the lead message, but it should rather support the larger story, or be the focus of its own piece.	Keeping tuition affordable is just another example of how we live out our mission. We believe finances shouldn't stand in the way of helping you find your purpose.

Personality

Personality humanizes the Dominican brand. It's a lens through which we can write copy, to ensure that everything sounds uniquely like us. When you're writing, ask yourself, is this something that a person with these traits would say?

At Dominican, we are:

Visionary

We continually reimagine what the world could look like through the lens of social justice, compassion and equity.

Tenacious

Because of our Dominican values, we take bold action in order to generate change.

Supportive

We build one another up through deep relationships and mentorship.

Joyful

We find great happiness in aligning our strengths with the world's needs.

Inquisitive

We seek out the truth in all things and refuse to shy away from hard questions.

Inclusive

We hold space for every voice and respect the dignity of all human experiences.

Section 2

Crafting Copy

Our message is what we say. Our voice is how we say it. Together, a compelling message and a consistent voice make the Dominican story resonate with our audiences and set us apart from our peers. Here, you'll find guidance to help you achieve this in every communication.

Messaging Tips

Getting our story down clearly and compellingly takes a combination of instinct and discipline.

Know your audience.

There's a world of difference between a transfer student and an alumnus, and what's important to an international student is different still. Write to your reader's experience and expectations, and your story will resonate more strongly.

Say one thing well.

People are busy. Attention spans are short (and getting shorter). Determine your one essential message, and stick to it. Mixed messages are rarely effective.

Make it about them.

Use the second-person "you" and "your" to engage and motivate the reader. Our message map defines us, but every piece you create is about the reader.

Make headlines count.

An effective headline is as much an invitation as it is a declaration. It makes an undeniable appeal to the reader that goes far beyond labeling the content it precedes.

Make data matter.

Statistics, rankings and rates of success aren't the story; they exist to help make your case to the reader. The numbers can add to your message, but they'll never take its place.

Speak to one person at a time.

Imagine you're writing a letter to a friend or a loved one. It will naturally focus your message, and keep you honest in every sense.

Make copy sing.

Pay off your headline, get to the point, support it well, and finish strong. The goal is to get your reader all the way to the end. Reward them for their time.

Avoid clichés and jargon.

Let's make our readers feel welcome in meaningful ways, not with easy phrases they could find in the materials of a dozen other colleges. Our language should feel genuine, true to our experience, and clear and inviting to the reader. Especially when we're talking to prospective students, our voice must be approachable and not overly formal.

Copy Samples

Included below are examples of how headlines can be infused with the Dominican voice to better illustrate our personality.

VISIONARY

Unvoiced

Students visit Google and Shedd Aquarium as part of future leaders program

Voiced

What the future looks like: Female students visit Google and the Shedd Aquarium through leadership program

TENACIOUS

Unvoiced

Dominican becomes a sanctuary campus

Voiced

The boldness to buck the status quo: Dominican becomes a sanctuary campus.

SUPPORTIVE

Unvoiced

Chanelle Bell MEd '16 starts "Positively Melanin" to help young black professionals find mentors

Voiced

In support of one another: Chanelle Bell MEd '16 launches a mentorship network for young black professionals

JOYFUL

Unvoiced

Jeremy Robinson MAT '09 recognized as a "Distinguished Teacher"

Voiced

With passion and purpose, alumnus Jeremy Robinson MAT '09 distinguishes himself as an educator.

INQUISITIVE

Unvoiced

Anna Dominguez '09 featured in *The Chicago Tribune*

Voiced

The queen of tape: How alumna Anna Dominguez's curiosity created a royal art form.

INCLUSIVE

Unvoiced

Inspiring the next generation of thought leaders

Voiced

Dominican's guest speaker series: Provoking dialogue, welcoming new voices, and building diverse perspectives.

Elevator Speech

How to use Dominican's messaging map as a guide to crafting conversations and communications about the university.

Step 1: Tone and Voice

Based on your audience, which personality traits best apply for the tone of your communication?

Audiences

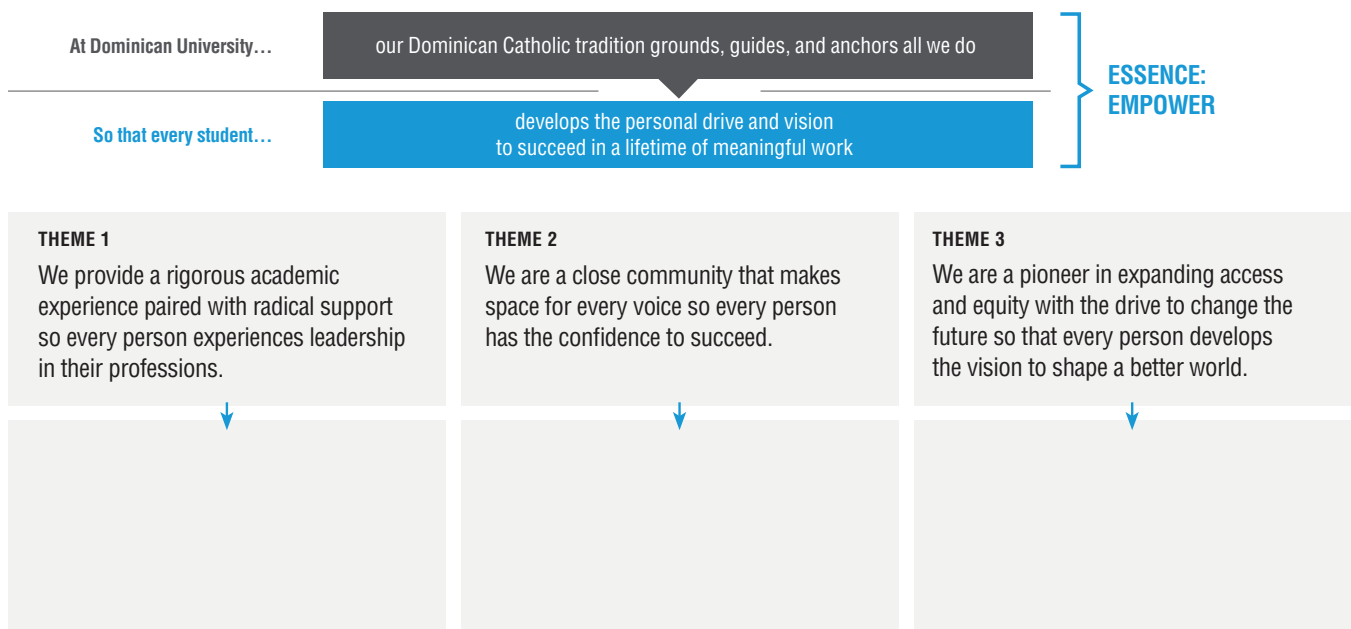
- Internal**
Goal: ALIGN, INSPIRE, RETAIN
- Recruitment**
Goal: ATTRACT, EDUCATE, EXCITE
- Advancement**
Goal: CULTIVATE, ENGAGE, DEEPEN
- Reputation**
Goal: ELEVATE, EXTEND, AMPLIFY

Personality Traits

- Visionary**
We continually reimagine what the world could look like through the lens of social justice, compassion, and equity.
- Tenacious**
Because of our Dominican values, we take bold action in order to generate change.
- Supportive**
We build one another up through deep relationships and mentorship.
- Joyful**
We find great happiness in aligning our strengths with the world's needs.
- Inquisitive**
We seek out the truth in all things and refuse to shy away from hard questions.
- Inclusive**
We hold space for every voice and respect the dignity of all human experiences.

Step 2: Brainstorm

With the messaging map as your starting point, jot down a few ways Dominican exemplifies our new brand platform.



Elevator Speech

How to use Dominican's messaging map as a guide to crafting conversations and communications about the university.

Step 3: Prioritize

Consider which messages will best align with your audience and your goal in connecting with them.

①	②	③
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Step 4: Bringing it Together

Using the prioritized messages, let's begin crafting what could become the starting point for an impactful conversation.

START with our core value proposition—but rewrite it in your own voice, leaning on the **personality traits** you highlighted.

NEXT, add a sentence or two that encapsulates the ideas you wrote down in **Step 3** under each pillar.

FINISH the statement with a sentence that brings everything together and showcases what makes Dominican distinct and a leader of change.

Elevator Speech Tips

Getting our story down clearly and compellingly takes a combination of instinct and discipline.

Understand your audience.

The more you know the better you'll be at tailoring your message to whomever is listening and capturing their attention. Make it about them; the most effective pronoun is "you."

Make it authentic.

Within the messaging framework, think of what attributes and benefits are most inspiring to you, and make the story personal and real. There is no one-size-fits-all pitch. Make it your own.

Keep it short and punchy.

Focus on one or two specifics plus the 30,000-foot view of why it matters.

Inspire curiosity.

You can't tell the whole story in 30 seconds. If there's one goal, it might be to inspire your listener's curiosity to want to know more and engage further.

Sample Elevator Speech

(Example 1)

Our Dominican Catholic tradition anchors everything we do. Driven by tenacity, inclusivity and excellence, every student is known and valued here. By combining highly ranked programs with radical support, we empower graduates to thrive in a life and career fueled by purpose.

(Example 2)

Because of our Dominican values, our students graduate empowered. Emboldened to achieve their deepest potential. Inspired to rise into meaningful careers. Supported every step of the way.

(Example 3)

Dominican is a highly ranked, radically supportive Catholic university with a long-standing commitment to inclusive excellence and to the success of all students. Graceful in appearance. Tenacious in spirit. Academically challenging. With a joyful heart.

Section 3

Appendix



The Process

Our Approach



Our Approach



- Research and document review
- Marketing and communications audit
- Competitor and peer audit
- Campus immersion
- Interviews and discussion groups
- Key insights
- Strategic workshop

Our Approach



- Brand positioning framework
- Value proposition
- Messaging development

Discovery

In this phase, we immersed ourselves in all facets of the Dominican University brand to assess the current situation and develop a findings and insights report.

Communications Audit

As part of this phase, we reviewed Dominican's current communications, brand assets and research to develop a better understanding of the current messaging and voice. This helped us determine how to draw on strengths, overcome challenges, and thoughtfully translate the Dominican brand.

During our discovery visit, we met with a core team of internal communicators to discuss successful communications, pieces that haven't worked as well as they should, and how the materials are being used. Back at the office, we analyzed what you've been saying, how you've been saying it, and the **big opportunities we see for your brand strategy**.

General

- strategic plans
- recent market research reports
- president's communications: key speeches, presentations, etc.
- alumni and student satisfaction surveys
- general publications about Dominican, including history, news, brochures, etc.
- promotional and PR efforts: current materials, videos, advertising, etc.
- internal communications tools: brand guidelines and identity standards
- competitive reviews
- current marketing, communications, and media plans
- current social channel strategy and performance data

Admissions

- viewbook and travel pieces
- financial aid booklets
- postcards and direct mail
- acceptance package
- orientation information
- communications to students
- web and mobile applications
- videos
- parent and guidance counselor outreach
- enrollment plans and documents describing historical enrollment trends

Academics

- key college, school, and program materials
- faculty and staff communications (newsletters, etc.)
- current student communications

Student Life

- student services materials (career services, residential life, etc.)
- school publications (such as magazines and newspapers)
- student clubs and activities materials
- event announcements, promotions, and invitations
- signature athletics pieces

Advancement and Alumni

- alumni communications
- recent magazine issues
- solicitations, such as for the annual fund or planned gifts
- thank-you and stewardship pieces
- event materials
- videos

Research

- current research initiatives
- recent PR releases related to research
- other key research materials

Interviews and Discussion Groups

Next, we met with key stakeholders, both over the phone and in person, to learn about the issues, challenges, and opportunities facing Dominican University.

Discussion topics

The types of subjects we discussed included:

- Perceptions, strengths, and opportunities
- How Dominican University is currently positioned among its competitors
- How target audiences are segmented and prioritized
- Consistencies and inconsistencies in how the university communicates with its audience segments today
- Challenges and opportunities to reaching target audiences
- Goals and objectives for the brand refresh
- Aspirations for Dominican University

Discussion groups

We met with:

- Faculty, Deans and Academic Leadership
- Staff across various divisions
- Current undergraduate students
- Prospective students (admitted but not yet attending)
- Current graduate students



Discovery Themes

Chicago needs to recognize your name and know your story.

Those in Dominican's backyard (and beyond) should associate the university with quality, support, and powerful outcomes. And you can't compete if no one knows who you are. So it's important to consider not only what Dominican's story is, but how that message is conveyed to your key audiences.

"People associate us with being local and good. But largely, people don't know who we are."

"It's known for its inexpensiveness and beautiful campus."

"People see Dominican as the value school — the Dollar Tree of universities."

"Today, Dominican is not first choice. They're choosing us because of economics."

"I think some people assume since it's Catholic that maybe it's more conservative."

"We really try to position ourselves as the best value, the best ROI, and really focused on careers."

"The story of Dominican is just not a sound-bite story, and we live in a sound-bite world."

TWO

Diversity and accessibility are, and have always been, central to Dominican's story.

Dominican has evolved from a women's college fighting for access to education, to a co-ed university that's recognized as a Hispanic-serving institution — and you're still tearing down barriers to equity. This story is compelling and should be shared. We just have to ensure that Dominican is delivering on it.

“My father really wanted me to interact with other Hispanic students, something I didn't really get a chance to do at my private school.”

“The school wasn't clear about who the student is. It's not white and middle class. Most students are low income and of color.”

“One of the most diverse schools I've ever seen. Nice change of pace to see all cultures.”

“There's no shying away from our Hispanic identity. You have to be up front about that.”

“We are an American university in the true sense as an HSI.”

“I want to make sure they know that we are accepting of everyone and very diverse.”

THREE

Students see the diversity, but don't always feel the inclusion.

Dominican's students feel that the university has a long way to go in achieving true inclusivity, and faculty acknowledge the work that's being done. We need to be careful with messaging, ensuring that we both reflect the path forward and remain authentic to who Dominican is today.

"We have fallen short and have had students who had really difficult times; they have come forward to call us on that."

"I have been called 'colonizer' more than once here, despite being Hispanic and a member of the LGBTQIA community."

"The university could benefit from sensitivity training that reminds minority students on campus to maintain a level of respect for all members of our community, including themselves."

"Dominican needs to truly become a Hispanic-serving institution, in the true sense of the word. What resources do you have for me?"

"Yes, there's diversity, but it feels like we're all so separate from each other."

"The commitment to diversity doesn't ring true; you have to be consistent across the board."

FOUR

At your core, you're driven by relationships.

Dominican is small, and that's intentional. At this size, relationships can permeate every aspect of classes and culture. Here the faculty and staff want students to feel known and supported.

“Dominican is the first place that I've actually developed relationships with my professors. They go above and beyond.”

“We're not an R1 institution. Instead, we're focused only on teaching. That's special.”

“I would say it's a tight-knit community where you know everyone and they don't hesitate to say hello.”

“A student who would do well is really interested in developing relationships and being part of a community.”

“Accessibility to full-time faculty is unparalleled, and for undergrads there is a full advising group focused on student success.”

“Our old brochure said 'small by design,' and that has always appealed to me.”

FIVE

Here, faith is a personal journey.

From seminar classes to reflective campus spaces and deep faculty mentorships, Dominican propels students toward personal discovery. Students learn exactly who they are and how they can best serve the greater good.

“We embrace who you are. We don’t judge who you aren’t.”

“It’s not the Catholic mission; it’s the social justice mission that really drives what we do.”

“Our interfaith efforts are very strong; you don’t have to be Catholic to come here. We strive to be inclusive.”

“I don’t know that there would be such a deep commitment to vocation and calling if we didn’t have such deep commitment to faith.”

“It’s more about social justice than anything else: bringing your deepest core values and beliefs and sharing them.”

“We say we’re Catholic, but we’re really not. There’s no chaplain. I’d like to see a brighter spotlight on our Catholic faith.”

The academic story is unclear.

When talking about academics, some people we spoke with emphasized the balance of rigor and support. Others highlighted niche programs. Still other folks addressed overall quality. When it comes to the academic offer, we need better alignment on what Dominican stands for.

“We can’t be everything to everybody, but we can be excellent in everything we do.”

“We need to send out the message that ‘you can be successful here.’ We have the statistics and rankings to prove it.”

“We should be a niche school in STEM and business, with an adherence to the liberal arts.”

“I’m thankful for the opportunities to be a Writing Fellow at the Academic Enrichment Center and a graduate assistant in the library.”

“We hold a high standard, but we help you get there. We walk the path with you.”

“We’re the only MLIS program in the Chicago area.”

SEVEN

You embrace a powerful balance.

At Dominican, there's a powerful balance: Between charity and truth. Community and challenge. The question and the answer. Support and academics. In fact, your high academic standards are born out of deep love for students and a desire to see them wildly succeed.

"I felt my program really focused on social justice, and that's a big part of what I wanted out of grad school."

"We have this commitment to the pursuit of truth and really valuing individual identity."

"We're helping them find a way to make a difference in their communities."

"The history of academic rigor and social justice is really unusual; it's an amazing heritage that we've gotten from the nuns."

"Love and truth — that permeates. It's part of our mission, and we even have a symposium that dives into different topics around aspects of that work that we do here."

"We don't do flunk-out classes; there's a real difference here. But we also want you to do the work and demonstrate that you're learning."

Thank you.



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