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The sports appeal: are athletics a viable academic marketing vehicle in higher education?

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THE SPORTS APPEAL:
ARE ATHLETICS A VIABLE ACADEMIC MARKETING VEHICLE IN HIGHER
EDUCATION?

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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in

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by
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ABSTRACT

Universities are beginning to brand themselves. The days when the doors to higher-ed opened and students flooded into the classrooms are no more. Colleges have to find ways to separate themselves from each other in a noisy marketplace. Also there is a decline in newsroom resources for academic coverage, which leaves university marketers searching for ways to communicate their messages. However, universities have another available marketing outlet, which is not seeing declining media attention: sports. College sports are a big business, which generate national media attention. The Southeastern Conference had revenues of over \$100 million from the marketing of its sports to television networks. The national reach of college sporting events is immense and university marketing officials have the opportunity to capitalize. This study examined a communications campaign launched by Louisiana State University's Office of University Relations to see how it translated athletic coverage generated by its 2003 college football national championship appearance into academic promotion. This case study was used to determine if athletics are a viable academic marketing tool in higher education. It used student enrollment, licensing revenue, and movement in the *U.S. News and World Report's* college rankings subsequent to the championship to evaluate the campaign and determine if sports are a viable academic marketing vehicle. Athletic success provided a *Halo* around the LSU brand and its Office of University Relations capitalized by launching a marketing campaign titled *A Great Game Plan On and Off the Field*. Since winning a football national championship LSU has realized a 208% increase in licensing royalties, student enrollment has reached record numbers, and its academic reputation ranking in *U.S. News and World Report's* college rankings increased. The positive results realized by LSU after winning an athletic national championship are an indicator that sports are an effective academic marketing vehicle in higher education.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study will examine a communications campaign launched by the Office of University Relations at Louisiana State University to see how it used the national exposure generated by a football national championship opportunity to promote the university's academic agenda. This work will seek to evaluate the campaign by identifying its strengths and weaknesses. It also will report results realized after the campaign. The results of this study have implications for other universities interested in using national exposure from their sports teams as a vehicle for academic promotion. The case study will provide an indicator whether or not national coverage generated by collegiate sports teams is an effective means of academic marketing.

Kirp (2003) believes higher education is in a state of flux, and the classical university structure is changing. Today more universities are being held more accountable for what they do, and more importantly how they do it. No longer are the days where universities are able to quietly wait for students to rush through their front doors. Now there is competition for students, and universities have to find their own niche to attract *consumers* of higher education. "There also is a growing recognition that few public investments have a higher payoff than higher education" (Duderstadt, 2000, p. 4). It has become a noisy marketplace, and universities are changing the way they operate. Higher education is becoming a business.

Through sports, universities have access to national audiences that they otherwise could not normally reach. With this exposure comes the danger of being stereotyped as a *sports school*. A sports school is one that is known as being primarily concerned with its athletic prowess while holding academics secondary. Most Southern universities have had to deal with this stereotype for some time due to their lower per capita incomes and weaker K-12 education systems. That

coupled with the constant media attention generated by the success of their sports teams has contributed to the development of a stereotype of Southern schools. The question becomes: Will using sports as a catalyst to advertise only enhance this stereotype? Or will it act as a vehicle to make people aware of LSU's academic goals and achievements?

In an article published by *The New York Times*, LSU Chancellor Mark Emmert (2004) acknowledged this stereotype. Emmert said that LSU's open enthusiasm for sports should not be confused with misplaced priorities. He points out that renowned astrophysicist Ed Seidel has joined LSU to lead "a bold new technology initiative" (Emmert, 2004, para 3). This article published January 4, 2004, the same day as the Sugar Bowl, is an example of how University Relations used athletics to market academics. This study will document how LSU's Office of University Relations launched a campaign that attempted to use attention gained by sports to pronounce its academic achievements in order avoid this Southern stereotype.

David Carter (2001) in an article written for *Business Week* says that the already thin line between college sports, especially big-time football, and the pros has all but disappeared. In the 1990's professional sports saw a significant trend in corporate ownership of big-league franchises where those corporations used those teams to market their companies. These corporations allotted their sports franchises as *loss leaders* where their designation was to boost the overall value the parent company, regardless of the franchise's gains or losses. Strategically these companies used the sports franchises to acquire cheap TV programming. At the same time, for the same reasons, universities began to use their athletic departments to accomplish the same goal. Sports for some universities became high profile programming to attract and keep customers.

Marketing through athletics can have detrimental side effects. Carter says that an excessive college experience in which the focus on sports portrays a party atmosphere and a neglect of academics is the most detrimental effect. However, it is through televised sports that many high school kids discover colleges outside of their communities. “Parents convinced by their teens and by marketing-savvy sports universities, spend billions to send their kids to such colleges without even recognizing that sports have closed the sale” (Carter, 2001, para 5). In his State of the Association address, NCAA President Cedric Dempsey voiced his concern about athletic marketing by saying, “The level of cynicism over the commercialization of our most visible athletic programs has reached epidemic proportions” (Carter, 2001, para 7).

This study is not a comparison of LSU with all other Southern universities, but an evaluation of the campaign launched by the Office of University Relations at LSU beginning on December 7, 2003. This study will not focus on sports marketing to gain students. It will, however measure the effects of LSU’s attempt to use its athletic prowess to distance itself from mis-perceptions of Southern universities by using the national attention to focus on academic achievements, and determine if sports are a viable academic marketing vehicle.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature summarized in this review represents relevant theories in marketing and branding of higher education. Its purpose is to document the integration of the principles of brand marketing into higher education's public relations initiatives.

David L. Kirp's book *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line* (2003) illustrates a transition in higher learning. He documents how different universities labor to illustrate their unique features in order to adapt to market pressures. He reiterates, "No matter what it is called, who does it, or where in the institution it is being done, universities are engaging in marketing" (Krachenberg, 1972, p. 370).

According to Kirp, entrepreneurship is one of the ideas that institutions of higher learning have imported from the business world. Ever since the flow of public money began to slow in the 1970's, universities have been searching for ways to operate more efficiently. Now more than ever, universities depend on private money. Resource management is more of a concern today than it ever was and creative marketing has become a means to create much needed revenue. Some universities even rely on outside firms to run the non-academic side of the institution.

James J. Duderstadt (2000), President Emeritus at the University of Michigan, believes that obsolescence lies in store for those who cannot adapt to these changing times. Universities are under attack, and the question is not will universities change; it is how and by whom? Higher education's commitment to teaching and its ability to do it well is being questioned. Duderstadt holds that criticism of universities is sporadic but is gaining force and direction. Faculty tenure, the quality of scholarly research, and tuition hikes are critical issues. He claims that the federal government over regulates universities. State and federal governments seek to regulate admission decisions and financial aid. The costs of accountability are excessive both in dollars and in the

administrative burden. Governance of public institutions is too often in the hands of people selected for partisan political reasons rather than for their understanding and support of higher education.

Duderstadt does not believe that universities are blameless. He attributes a reactive approach in responding to the demands from students, faculty, and government as part of the reason for criticism. He believes that competition has distracted universities from noticing these growing criticisms. Further, higher education has yet to come together in one voice to defend itself.

Scott Jaschik, editor of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, says that the biggest trend in higher education is to see it as a consumer topic (Stepp, 2003, p. 20). Parents want to know “Where is my kid going to get into college? ‘How am I going to pay for it?’ and ‘Is my kid going to get a job afterward?’” (Stepp, 2003, p. 20). Students and parents see colleges as commodities and universities have to market themselves as such in order to be competitive with other universities. Some universities see themselves as brands that need to be marketed and sold. In recognizing this, university communications and marketing departments are becoming increasingly important.

One of the core issues in marketing and communications is branding. What is a brand? How do you market one? Businesses, universities, hospitals, etc. all have services to offer. One of their primary goals is to separate themselves from their competitors. *The Dictionary of Business and Management* defines a brand as: “a name, sign or symbol used to identify items or services of the sellers and to differentiate them from goods of competitors” (Rosenberg, 2002). There is yet to be an agreed upon definition of a brand because a brand is unique to the individuals who create it. It is up to them to decide the functions of their brand and what it

means. Advertising legend Walter Landor defines a brand as a promise because by identifying and authenticating a product or service it delivers a pledge of satisfaction and quality.

In his book *Building Strong Brands*, David Aaker (1995) notes that brands are not necessarily positive. He defines a brand as a set of assets (or liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service.

Colin Bates looks at brands through the eyes of a consumer. He defines a brand as “a collection of perceptions in the mind of the consumer” (Bates, 2003). Bates holds that a brand is different from a product or service, because it is intangible and exists in the mind. Different people have different perceptions of a product, which places them at different places on the loyalty ladder. A brand is not built through fancy logos or effective communications; it is built through the total experience that it offers.

Although this study is focusing on the use of national media to communicate a message, branding is an important part of the communication process because it starts from the top down, beginning with the president of the company or the chancellor of the university down to the faculty or staff. There must be a commitment that is made to send consistent messages from all departments.

Like Landor, Dr. Robert A. Sevier (2002) defines branding as a promise kept. People don't buy things; they buy names (Sevier, 2002, p. 5). Sevier notes a current trend that is forming in university marketing. A number of colleges are seeking to heighten prestige with the understanding that families will pay more to attend a school that is better known and highly regarded. He believes that well-known institutions are able to charge more because of brand awareness: how well their name is known. Bruce Hammond (1999) in his book *Discounts and*

Deals at the Nation's 360 Best Colleges: The Parent Soup Financial Aid and College Guide, calls this *The Chivas Regal Effect*.

Sevier takes this a step further and identifies what great brands do. First, he writes that great brands are in it for the long haul. Since there are so many choices in the marketplace, a great brand is able to differentiate itself and therefore make itself a necessity, not a luxury. A great brand knows itself. It knows what its reputation is, because it asks its customers. When doing this, the brand will become narrowly focused. It is sometimes necessary to strike out in a new position and surprise the buyer in order to reenergize the brand. A great brand has a personality and a style that is expressed through emotional attributes. Emotions drive most of our decisions, and a good brand finds a way to attach itself to that emotion through experience. Positive consumer experiences create emotion toward the brand. Finally, great brands rarely succeed when they try to be everything to everyone.

Branding is a strategy employed by universities when communicating internally and externally. Can every college be branded? David Hoover, Senior Director of University Marketing at Ohio State University (OSU) says, “yes” (Sevier, 2002, p. 20). Hoover says that the uniqueness of OSU can come only from the “whole” rather than the individual parts. “We must define all of our attributes that can, in combination, serve to distinguish us. For example, at Ohio State none of our core attributes (large size, academic excellence, diversity, located in a capital city, Midwestern values, football strength, high admission standards, land-grant heritages, etc.) are that distinctive on their own, but in combination we are finding that we can define a university that is different from all others” (Sevier, 2002, p. 20).

Argetsinger (2002) writes that in a perpetual race to raise their national profiles, college leaders are starting to advertise themselves to an unlikely audience: each other. This is an attempt

to raise *academic reputation* ratings that are part of the *America's Best Colleges* rankings compiled annually by *U.S. News and World Report*. The phenomenon of inter campus marketing is important because the rankings have an effect on the number of students who apply or the amount of recruiters who visit. The rankings have shown that reputation does matter. It accounts for 25% of the overall score. University of Maryland officials say that they did not lobby survey takers and their reputation score bumped up from 3.7 on a five-point scale to a 3.8 in 2002. Although a modest move, it was enough to improve from 21st to 18th on *U.S. News's* ranking of best public universities. Although this is a case where reputation helped improve the ranking, most academic reputations are very slow to build and even slower to be lost. According to Robert Morse (2002), *U.S. News* director of data research, "most schools have maintained largely the same rating over the past several years" (Argetsinger, 2002, para 16).

Michael Arnone (2003) writes that many state universities are looking to translate a strong regional presence into national recognition and respect. These universities seek to get the state to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on construction, well-known faculty, and recruiting. It is up to the communications departments to couple those initiatives with slick advertising campaigns that portray the university as being on the cusp of greatness. According to Arnone, becoming a national research institution is what these universities see as vital to their mission. He believes the problem is that state legislatures have to decide whether to give money to established flagships, which are generally more highly ranked, produce more research, and have higher profile students and faculty, or to other in-state universities. Diane Craig, research director at the Center for Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences, at the University of Florida says, "If you want to improve research and need private money to do it, then you have to go national" (Arnone, 2003, para 8). These universities are known as *The Wannabes*. He holds

these universities don't act solely to improve rankings, though, because they have to be good as well as being perceived as being good.

Craig McGuire (2000) writes that branding and communicating for Ivy League schools are different than they are for The Wannabes. Schools like Yale and Harvard hardly need to brand nationally as much as other universities, but they have to position themselves around each other. They are competing for a much smaller pool of students. As a result, most Ivy League universities have a small central communications office and a large number of independent communications professionals spread out among many schools. These professionals all answer to one person: the communications director. This flexible structure assures a consistent message and enables them to maximize resources and cover more ground. Ivy League schools rely mostly on their research in medicine and science to generate attention. They also use experts on law and business to do interviews and correspondent work for networks for publicity.

McGuire believes another asset that is unique to Ivy League public relations is their alumni. They act as public relations assistants who pitch in and actually pay for the privilege of representing the school. Ed Hershey, director of communications strategies at Cornell, says that they have a 5,000-member Cornell Alumni Admissions Ambassadors Network with a regional structure of volunteer workers who aid in promoting the university without pay.

While forming marketing messages, universities have begun to determine their reputation in order to gauge outside perceptions of their schools. After hiring a marketing firm in 2003, Stambaugh (2003) writes the University of Tennessee (UT) found that it had a long way to go before it would be seen as a top-notch college. A report issued by the firm, Educational Marketing Group, noted that the public at large identifies UT mainly with its sports teams rather than its academic and research assets. According to the report's executive summary "despite

challenging academics, excellent faculty, major research projects and superior implementation of the land-grant mission through statewide services, public awareness appears to be driven in large part by the unusual strength of the institution's athletic programs" (Stambaugh, 2003, para 4). In their report, the EMG's owners Bob and Marlene Brock cited a lack of a singular academically based identity as one problem that needs to be addressed. UT's use of inconsistent messages and visual approaches has hindered its ability to impact audience perceptions and to shape the state's and the nation's higher education agenda. EMG made several recommendations, including the statement that UT should adopt "a clear and consistent brand architecture" to define the system and its campuses (Stambaugh, 2003, para 9). The report also suggested that UT develop a more consistent marketing plan, and focus its communications toward a more regional, national, and international scope.

Other Southern schools similar to the University of Tennessee are noticing that they are more recognized for their athletics than their academics. The University of Alabama (UA) is an example. Ty West (2004) believes its recent "Dream a little dream" commercial campaign shows that the administration is trying to change the school's reputation. The commercial presents Alabama President Robert Witt walking along the football captain walk-of-fame. While the camera shoots down the sidewalk with the names of Alabama football greats, President Witt says that he wants to meet all of the All-Americans. When he says this he means the USA Today's Academic All-Americans, rather than Alabama's football players. West believes the university is using sports analogies to show its effort to de-emphasize sports. However, he argues that the school's athletic reputation is more of a benefit than a problem. West believes having strong sports has helped some universities more than it has hurt them. He notes that before 2000, Gonzaga University did not have much national exposure or recognition. Now in 2004, after

Gonzaga has made three consecutive NCAA tournament appearances, most college basketball fans have heard of the *Zags*. According to Gonzaga's web site, enrollment has reached record numbers. He attributes this to the increased name recognition generated through sports.

Further, West argues that more Americans care about sports than they do about the academic reputations of every school in the country and that national overexposure only helps universities. Recognition through sports creates an awareness of schools that normally wouldn't exist. He believes few schools are known solely for their academics outside the Ivy League. Northwestern, Baylor, and Vanderbilt are examples, but West argues that if the sports programs at those schools got more recognition then the reputations of those schools would shift as well. Besides the reputation, West does not see anything wrong with people knowing the University of Alabama primarily for its football. He believes it's just a product of the world in which we live. Further, he believes the university's football reputation brings in a lot of money for the school, which helps improve UA's academic programs.

An article titled *It's About Winning in Everything: LSU Chief Aims Higher than Sugar Bowl* (2003) notes that Louisiana State University Chancellor Mark Emmert agrees with using sports to gain national exposure. His reasoning for making head football coach Nick Saban the highest paid coach in college football is that it will provide a rallying point for LSU. He believes improving football will draw more attention to all facets of the school. LSU System President William Jenkins agrees with the idea of building a nationally competitive football team. "Having a strong visible program is one of your windows to the world" (Hasten, 2003, para 22). LSU's football achievements coincide with the university's ten-year Flagship Agenda. "Its not just about winning in football, it's about winning in everything," said Emmert (Hasten, 2003, para 3).

He believes that if LSU can convince Louisiana that LSU can be first in football, then they will see that LSU can be first in physics, English, math, engineering, etc.

Athletics can be very lucrative for universities, and according to Swartz (2003) some schools see athletics as a cash cow. She holds that the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), a \$100 million business, is a model for how to make money from college athletics. Eddie Easley, a sports marketing professor at Wake Forest University, notes that the financial stakes are high in college sports. She writes the ACC's formula is simple. "Bigger television contracts mean more money; more money means better athletic programs; better athletic programs mean bigger television contracts" (Swartz, 2003, para 4). She reports that in 2002, the ACC had revenues of more than \$98 million. The conference received \$28 million from regular-season basketball coverage, \$5.3 million from the ACC's tournament and \$12.8 million from the NCAA tournament. \$21.1 million came from the regular season in football and \$20.4 million came from bowl games. Of that \$98 million, \$87 million was divided evenly among other schools in the conference. That means that when an ACC team wins a bowl game, all the other schools in the conference make money.

Swartz also illustrates the demand for college sports on television. John Swofford, the ACC's commissioner, negotiated a 10-year television contract in 2001 for regular season basketball coverage with Jefferson-Pilot Sports for \$28 million. That is a 65 % increase from the year before. She writes these increases are made possible because of the conference's good athletic and academic image. Few of the schools have sanctions or academically ineligible players. Easley says that along with the financial integrity that needs to be protected, the academic integrity of the universities has to be guarded if they are going to participate in sports.

Otherwise, all of the universities suffer and college sports will become the minor leagues for professional sports.

The Southeastern Conference (SEC), which is the conference LSU is a member, has multi-year agreements with CBS Sports, ESPN, and Jefferson-Pilot to televise SEC sports throughout the 2008-09 academic year. According to its website, for the first time, every SEC football game on CBS will be televised nationally. Person (2003) reports the SEC distributed \$101.9 million to its 12 schools in 2003, which is the largest revenue produced by an athletics conference. Of the \$101.9 million, \$41.4 million generated was TV money. According to an article titled *National Prominence* on the SEC's website, the nine-state SEC region represents 20% of television households in the U.S. It also publishes more than 70 daily newspapers. Person writes networks and sponsors are attracted to the SEC by its football teams. Football generated \$73.4 million for the conference in 2003 -- \$41.4 million in TV money, \$19.6 million from bowl games, and \$12.4 million from the football championship game. "We're in a region of a country where football is important to a lot of people," said Brad Edwards, USC's associate athletics director for business and development. "We have large stadiums and we fill them up. Athletically, football has been the engine that has really driven the bulk of our conference programs" (Person, 2003, para 17)

In his article *The Professionalizaion of College Sports*, Richard G. Sheehan (2000) argues that college sports have become dominated by professional considerations. He holds that few studies have adopted a comprehensive approach to the question of whether college sports have been dominated by professional considerations because universities were reluctant to release financial information that would allow outsiders to determine their level of professionalization. Sheehan says the passage of the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act gives researchers the

opportunity to see if colleges are making money off their athletic programs. He believes the common perception is that Division 1A football and men's basketball have been professionalized while other sports and divisions have not. He defines professionalization by asking the question: Is the institution focusing primarily on costs, revenues, and profits when operating its athletic program? That is, is the athletic program now run like a professional franchise? Sheehan believes that a "yes" answer means that college sports have been professionalized. Alternately, are colleges focusing on the overall academic mission of the institution even when guiding the athletic program? Is there any substantive difference between the importance of the academic mission in the conduct of collegiate football in the 1990's and the 1900's? A "no" answer indicates that college sports are not becoming increasingly professional even though they may be profitable.

Sheehan asks three questions. First, is the professionalization perspective accurate now? Second, is that perspective more accurate now than ten years ago? And third, what economic incentives exist that reinforce or mitigate the professional tendencies or emphasis? Sheehan lists several motivating forces behind a successful athletic program. One of them is maximizing the college's reputation, enrollment, and endowment. Sheehan's theory is that an athletic program is professional if the primary pursuit is profit. Since it would be impossible to get a university chancellor or president to admit using sports for profit, Sheehan believes that using a university's objectives to determine the level of professionalization will not work. Instead he focuses on the athletic revenues and expenditures of universities. His conclusion is that collegiate football and men's basketball appears to fit the professional model, while other sports do not.

But what can be said about the balance between academic concerns and athletic concerns? Although Sheehan, an economist, noted that he would only look at profits in

determining professionalization, he still believes that profits can be realized outside of revenue made for attendance, and television contracts. A university reaching its objectives can achieve these profits. Sheehan does not believe that colleges have the appropriate balance between or the correct emphasis on sports for two reasons. First he sees economic incentives being tilted toward sports. In what other endeavor can Duke or Florida or Notre Dame, or Ohio State generate as much publicity as with their sports program? Secondly, it appears to Sheehan that relatively little thought has been given to the question of how intercollegiate sports contribute to the educational mission of a university.

How should colleges market themselves? Is there anything wrong with having an image founded in athletics? One of the purposes of this research is to examine the environment around higher education to see if sports are a feasible outlet to market academic achievements. Some may have to use sports as a marketing outlet because of a lack of positive coverage from the media. In his article *Higher Examination*, Carl Stepp (2003) says that the reverent tone that came with covering higher education is passing. He believes today's reporters are adding a broader dimension of aggressive, critical coverage to the tradition of reporting on research or student protest. He identifies two reasons for this skepticism toward higher education. One of the reasons is that newsroom resources are shrinking and papers may leave higher-ed jobs vacant or ask reporters to double up by also covering grade schools. Ultimately, there is a lack of higher education expertise on newspaper staffs. The other is due to a news story that was a Pulitzer Prize finalist done by journalist Patrick Healy. Healy found that Harvard was graduating more than 90% of its students with honors (Stepp, 2003, para 2). This is in comparison with Yale (51%), and Princeton (44%). Healy concluded that Harvard's grade inflation has made graduating with honors at Harvard meaningless. Demand for increased accountability, access and

affordability of higher education has aided in this skepticism. Stepp believes these issues, coupled with rising tuition across the country, have pushed colleges off of the pedestal they once occupied and they are now being held more accountable for their messages and policies. Stepp is not suggesting that the news media have hurled themselves into frenzy over the policies of universities and in turn decided to give them poor coverage. He is instead suggesting that reporters are less likely to treat colleges as exotic wonderlands. This promotes a lack of understanding of higher education in the public eye

Further, Stepp notes that editors across the country believe that people just don't want to hear about higher education because it seems so distant. The only people who might want to hear about higher education are parents of students. Journalists also note that people never call or email to demand higher education stories. However an oft-cited irony is that nearly all papers manage to find resources for a certain kind of higher-ed coverage: sports. He says *The Miami Herald*, for example, has five reporters covering college athletics compared to one reporter for higher-ed.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODOLOGY, AND EVALUATION

Research Questions

This study is related to Louisiana State University's new stated focus: achieving national prominence. Further research questions need to be developed in order to determine how sports can help LSU achieve this goal. The first question is: How can LSU use its positive national sports exposure to achieve further national prominence?

Beginning in fall 2002, Louisiana State University officials began to discuss a national flagship agenda. This focused on how LSU could improve its research and educational enterprise to make it more nationally competitive. According to the University's core values of collegiality and open dialogue, this Flagship Agenda is the culmination of discussions and debates among the faculty, staff, students, and friends of the University.

On its website, LSU defines the National Flagship Agenda as the following:

The National Flagship Agenda is a seven-year plan to bring LSU to a new level of excellence. It focuses on action steps that increase research and scholarly productivity and the quality and competitiveness of graduate and undergraduate students. The outcomes are designed to place LSU in a position to compete on all levels with the finest public universities in the country. As a national flagship institution, LSU will advance knowledge and intellectual inquiry by promoting groundbreaking research; produce enlightened citizens by fostering critical thinking, ethical reflection, historical understanding, and cultural appreciation; enhance Louisiana by converting scientific and technological discoveries into new products and processes, by preparing an informed and creative labor force, and by applying university resources to solve economic, environmental, and educational challenges.

The goals of the flagship agenda are to:

- Increase research productivity in support of long-term economic development.
- Increase the number and quality of graduate students and programs.
- Increase the quality of undergraduate students and programs.

- Improve quality of campus life.
- Assess LSU's progress and communicate achievements.
- Increase funding sources to support objectives 1-5.

Athletic success is not a part of the flagship agenda, but it is linked to its fifth objective of communicating achievements. Sports could be the best way for LSU to communicate its achievements to a national audience. This leads to a second research question: Does sports exposure provide LSU with the best outlet to communicate its academic achievements to national audiences?

On Sunday, December 7, 2003, it was announced that LSU would play the University of Oklahoma on January 4, 2004, in the Nokia Sugar Bowl held in New Orleans, Louisiana, for the college football national championship. This athletic achievement provided LSU with a month to plan for and achieve a month of national sports media coverage and the opportunity to use that achievement to direct attention toward academic success at LSU. The Office of University Relations at LSU had from December 7 until the game on January 4 to create a marketing plan to use the championship attention to promote LSU's academic attributes. Further, winning the game has given LSU even more recognition and has provided more opportunity for academic marketing through sports.

Conduct of the Research

Four major areas of study are necessary to answer the research questions. They are academic research, a case study evaluation, an examination of previous image studies done by LSU, and an assessment of LSU's student enrollment, licensing revenues, and position in *U.S. News and World Report's* college ranking since its national championship.

Academic research comes from Internet articles, books, journal articles, and newspaper articles that are relevant to branding, academic marketing, and sports marketing. These articles describe the current state of university marketing, and the union of, or separation between, athletics and academics, while providing results realized by LSU after the campaign.

A case study evaluation was conducted in order to document a specific instance where sports provided an outlet for academic marketing. The case study supplements the research and provides a framework for using athletics to promote academics.

An examination of previous image studies conducted by Louisiana State University's Office of University Relations was then undertaken to give the researcher specific information about perceptions of the university. The studies include an image study, and a prospective student survey. This information was then utilized, with the case study evaluation, to determine if athletics are a viable academic marketing tool.

Information regarding LSU's student enrollment, licensing revenue and position in *U.S. News and World Report's* college ranking were ascertained to indicate the effect of LSU's national championship on the brand image of the university. Changes in these categories from the previous year provided an indicator whether or not academic marketing through athletics heightens the prestige of the LSU brand and enhances the perception of its academics.

Methodology

As noted above, this thesis is a case study of the campaign launched by LSU's Office of University Relations. It measures the campaign's effects to answer the two research questions cited above. The case study method was chosen because it allows for an analysis of how a Southern school seeking to gain national prominence used sports as a vehicle for academic promotion. Instead of using the sports exposure to possibly further the *Southern stereotype*, LSU

officials sought to take advantage of its national championship exposure to distance the university from that stereotype.

Personal interviews were conducted to obtain perspectives regarding the current state of university marketing from inside and outside of Louisiana State University. The interviews from inside LSU document the specific challenges that Louisiana State University faces in image management. They also illustrate the Office of University Relations' plan to use a Sugar Bowl appearance to enhance that image. Interviews from outside LSU represent the perspective of knowledgeable individuals regarding the use of athletics to market academics in higher education.

Interviews from inside LSU were selected in order to gain four perspectives. The first perspective is from the Office of University Relations. These interviews provide a detailed analysis of the challenges faced when launching a marketing campaign using sports as a vehicle to market academic accomplishments. They also document the goals sought to be achieved from the campaign.

The second perspective comes from Louisiana State University's System President. This interview indicates the position the university system's leader held regarding the use of athletic marketing to promote the university academically.

The third perspective comes from LSU's athletic department. These interviews were used to document the perceived costs and benefits of academic marketing through sports for a university.

The fourth perspective comes from the LSU Foundation. The Foundation's goal is to raise money for the university's academic programs. These interviews were used to determine whether or not philanthropy has increased due to the Sugar Bowl appearance. If philanthropy has

increased, these interviews help indicate whether or not the additional contributions stem from winning the football national championship or because of an improved academic image of LSU due to the campaign.

All subjects from inside of LSU were asked a set of umbrella questions in order to gauge the overall level of marketing consistency at LSU.

An interview outside of Louisiana State University was conducted with LSU's media placement Account Executive in order to indicate how media coverage of LSU has been affected by the national championship. An outside interview with the Vice President for Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin was also conducted. This interview illustrates the perspective of another communications director at a Southern school where nationally prominent athletics are featured as a marketing tool, helping provide a basis for comparison with the LSU campaign. Examples of the questions used in these interviews appear in Appendix A.

Models of Evaluation

The results of the interviews were taken and documented according to one of the four perspectives mentioned above. The summary of the material indicates the strengths and weaknesses of the campaign and provides a description of how these four offices worked in tandem to promote LSU's academic achievements through its sports success.

Following the organization of the material, the researcher answers and analyzes the research questions based on responses from the interviews. In addition, the campaign is further evaluated by examining LSU's student enrollment, licensing revenue, and movement in *U.S. News and World Report's* college rankings. Changes in these areas from the previous year help determine the success of the campaign and are used to measure the effects of success in sports on the university's brand.

List of Interviews

Office of University Relations

Dr. Gene Sands	Executive Director
Holly Houk	Director of Integrated Marketing
Robin Dunkin	Senior Marketing Strategist

Office of the President

Dr. William Jenkins	LSU System President
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Athletic Department

Herb Vincent	Athletic Director of External Relations
Tommy Karam	Director of Communications Studio

LSU Foundation

Cecil Phillips	Chief Executive Officer/President
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Outside Interviews

Mark DiPietro	Account Executive, Gehrung and Associates
Don Hale	Vice President for Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin

CHAPTER 4: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNIVERSITY MARKETING

The marketplace in higher education has become so crowded that universities are being forced into long term strategic planning. Doug Lederman of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* says, “at any given time there are literally dozens of schools vying to be considered one of the top 20 institutions in the country” (Anderson, 2000, para 12). It is no longer a birth right for students to attend the university of their hometown. Today’s universities are becoming more visible and are being positioned nationally through rankings such as *Business Week*’s ranking of top MBA programs and *U.S. News and World Report*’s annual college rankings. These issues have become top sellers and the slightest fluctuation in these ranking affects the university’s enrollment. For example, when Cornell’s Management Graduate School moved from 18th to 8th in the *Business Week* ranking, applications for the following year rose by 50%. Universities have to compete for the best and brightest students, staff and faculty now more than ever and the best way to attract them is through marketing.

Other factors are causing universities to engage in marketing. One is a decline in state funding. It is now necessary for universities to raise money through various philanthropic efforts to support their daily operations. Marketing plays a vital role in the fundraising process because potential donors want to know the university’s vision and mission before they donate. They also want to be associated with a university that is perceived as a winner. Successful marketing will discover who these donors are, through research, and will communicate the university’s message to them.

Accountability and affordability are the results of increased competition. Institutions have to find ways to show the value of the degrees they award, and it is up to marketing departments to find ways to differentiate their academic value from their competitors.

The increasing importance of marketing has led universities to find ways to integrate marketing functions with public relations in order to build a university image that will resonate and get the institution through times of hardship when there is a crisis. Now university marketing departments have to be able to react in the bad times, and brand in the good times. They continue to brand and rely on their brand value to sustain to their image during times of scrutiny. The brand image is the most vital part of an institution. David Delassandro (2001), CEO of John Hancock, believes a strong image will carry the organization through all times of hardship and in times of crisis nurturing the brand should be the top priority of upper management.

Before any long term planning can begin, universities must adopt a proactive approach to the process. They can no longer rely on a reactive public relations function. This can be accomplished by expanding the public relations function into one that embraces the marketing goals to give the university a set of consistent messages and images that will ultimately define the university in the public eye. An integrated marketing process, which relies on data rather than anecdotal information, will enable an institution to better understand the needs of its markets; develop strategies to address those needs; evaluate the effectiveness of those needs; and position itself for the future.

University marketing follows the same guidelines as business marketing. Phillip Kotler (1981) defines marketing as: “The analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational goals” (Kotler and Murphy, 1981, p. 120) He believes there are three levels of planning in university marketing. The first level refers to the budgeting and scheduling process. The second level encompasses short range planning. This level includes planning revolving around curriculum, recruitment of students, and physical plant

decisions. The third level is long range planning, which includes strategic planning. Strategic planning looks at the environment surrounding the institution and devises plans for the long term in order to create a strategic fit between the university and its evolving market. The institution needs to know what thoughts and images come to mind when its name is mentioned. It also needs to know what the demographics look like for their prospective students. This can all be accomplished through environmental scanning.

In his book *Integrated Marketing for Colleges, Universities, and Schools*, Robert A. Sevier (1998) notes five mega- trends that are occurring in higher education. One is the changing demographics of students. From a demographic perspective, there will be little growth in the Caucasian population. At the same time, there is tremendous growth among Hispanics and Asians. These demographic shifts mean that more future consumers of higher education will be persons of color. If some universities believe they do not need to recruit these students, they are wrong. Also, according to Howe and Strauss (2003) today's students are *co-buying* higher education with their parents. Their book titled *Millennials Go to College* notes that the millennial generation, which are currently in college, have different characteristics than previous generations. They rely heavily on their parents when making decisions and universities should therefore distinguish parents as a target audience.

Marketing begins with the *marketing mix*, which consists of the four *P*'s: Product, price, place, and promotion. These are the four variables that institutions can manipulate as part of their marketing strategy. The first *P*, product, is the sum of an institution's academic, social, physical, and spiritual dimensions and the opportunities that are available to students. It is becoming increasingly difficult to quantify product. How can universities prove their diploma is better than their counterpart's? This is where product can be most effective. The product that is being sold,

and the university's mission and vision must be in unison. A university must identify which of the *P*'s it does best. This may include aspects of its price, or place. In selling the product, communicators can focus particularly on strong departments at the university in order to co-brand the rest of the university with those successful departments.

The second *P*, price, includes both the dollar and non-dollar costs. Non-dollar costs are also part of the product. The university may be good for one student, but the next student may count part of the university's demographic or geographic makeup as a cost. University communicators should realize this and instead concentrate on value. Taking into account the cost/benefit ratio will give university marketing officials a better position when it comes to price. Students want to know what they will receive in terms of value for their perceived costs.

The third *P* is place. Where is the university? What outside landmarks and opportunities does the city offer that prospective students can experience while enrolled in the university? In the marketing mix, place has become less of a factor due to the development of online universities. According to Howe and Strauss (2003) today's college student is mobile and is more likely to consider attending one of the for-profit online universities. Now, place takes on a whole different meaning for traditional universities. Future college students aren't opposed to forgoing the conventional college experience to gain flexibility. In terms of product, the location of the university can still be what makes the university unique. This can be one of the attributes that set one university apart from another.

The fourth *P* is promotion, which is the best-known *P* in the marketing mix. There are several options when considering promotion. They include: word of mouth, telemarketing, signage, magazine advertising, newspaper advertising, TV/cable advertising, radio advertising, Internet, PSA's, special events, and direct mail.

The university should conduct research to determine which medium will best communicate which message to which target market as its first step in creating a marketing plan. Research informs and guides the marketing team. Sevier (1998) believes the goal is to present information on which a university can act. It is critical to understand what needs to be learned, and which audiences have the answers. The second step in conducting research is designing the methodology. Focus groups, mail surveys, telephone surveys, and in-depth interviews are all possibilities. Other steps include writing the research instrument, drawing the sample, executing the study, analyzing the data, and presenting the results.

Once the university has the answers to these questions, it can begin to develop an image. Fred Gehrung, president of Gehrung and Associates, a media-relations company specializing in higher education believes “every mention of a university is an investment in its future, for it nourishes awareness that converts to respect. Like it or not, the public equates a high profile with quality” (Sevier, 1998, p. 68). Awareness of a college’s name or reputation is a pivotal first step in foundation work. Institutions with strong images are able to recruit better faculty, and students.

Images are built over time, but there are circumstances that help define the image of the institution. Sevier calls these *moments of truth*. Impressions begin with a powerful first impression. Moments of truth are encounters, upon which all future impressions are built. He believes that they are so strong that it is difficult if not impossible to change the direction of an image after a poor first impression. Secondly, it is important that the university acknowledges these opportunities and capitalizes on them. They can sometimes create these moments of truth. This can help separate one university from another while creating brand identity. It is important for universities to be recognized by their internal and external audiences as excellent. University

communicators should employ this top-of-mind strategy and use moments of truth to help define the product. This paper is suggesting that a moment of truth can be a sports championship. The recognition could be used to translate the success on the field to the success off the field therefore increasing the perception of the university's academic value.

Image management acknowledges a formula that's expressed as: (Accuracy + Clarity + Consistency) x Continuity. The university that's sold in the recruiting videos must be the university the student will experience when he or she arrives. Clarity is defined by a question. Are the messages clear and understandable? Consistency means settling on a logo and sticking to it. It is necessary to develop a fact sheet for all departments to use. Continuity means continuing to use those messages. Images are slow to build and slow to lose, therefore once a message is created it is necessary to continue the process.

An essential component of successful marketing is getting approval from the president of the university. He or she must commit to the marketing campaign, both philosophically and financially, and share the same goals as the marketing department. Once this is accomplished, the university should evaluate its current image, which can be accomplished through image surveys. Sevier (1998) notes three dimensions which universities are best evaluated. They are: how primary audiences perceive the institution; how the institution projects itself editorially and environmentally; and how the institution is compared with its cohort group.

It is also necessary to segment the market. In a university's case, these segments include potential students, alumni, parents, and officials at other universities. Segmenting will enable university communicators to speak with chosen audiences more effectively. Sevier defines multisegment strategy, which is where the organization recognizes diverse needs and develops segments for each one. This means developing a manageable array of product, price, place, and

promotion mixes for each definable market segment. This will allow the university to serve a greater number of potential audiences.

Integration of Marketing and Public Relations at Louisiana State University

The following information was provided in a personal interview with the Executive Director of LSU's Office of University Relations, Dr. Gene Sands on March 8, 2004.

Louisiana State University has a new stated goal: reaching national prominence. Its plan states LSU will best serve the citizens of Louisiana by pursuing its goal of being recognized nationally as one of the leading public universities in the South and as one of the top 20 public universities in the nation. LSU's Office of University Relations plays the central role in shaping the university's image. As the university's public relations office, it is currently undergoing a metamorphosis to adapt to the university's new mission, by expanding into a full service marketing department that uses public relations as a subset of the overall marketing function. The transformation allows the department to anticipate and solve problems.

Sands, believes that the mission of the office must change along with the university's mission. "For years, in higher education, we've been in the 'sending out' mode. The marketplace in higher education has become so noisy and so highly competitive that that is no longer the case" (Anderson, 1999, para 5).

A proactive approach requires market research in order to aggressively place messages to target audiences to accomplish institutional goals. In the past, the Office of University Relations measured its success by the number of stories run in the media. This method does not account for accuracy. Secondly, it does not disclose whether or not the university was reaching its target markets.

Before engaging in research, a communication audit was done in order to take a snapshot look at the department's functions and how they benefit the university's mission. It benchmarks the program, divulging the positive and negative aspects of the operation. "It is important to see what you are accomplishing; what you are doing well and what you are doing not so well," said Sands. "When you get the results, you evaluate them and share them with the leadership of the university, so they can see where you are and what you are accomplishing."

It also was necessary to hire marketing personnel to build a marketing staff. "Changing a system takes time," said Sands. "I took a year to get to know the people, the surrounding community and the system at LSU. Once I knew that, I could identify the areas where the department could evolve, and how we could tailor the department so it would be able to pursue special strategic goals that support the university's special strategic goals. The change signifies growth from being a responsive entity, in a 'sending out' mode, to one that is now segmenting strategic markets, analyzing them, and, communicating the university's message to them."

A marketing group was formed which conducted a *SWOT* analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). It was also necessary for the marketing group to prioritize its target audiences. "Traditionally universities have several target audiences to prioritize. It is a difficult group to place in an order, but it must be done. The order of the list depends on the university," said Sands. "There are internal audiences (faculty and staff), prospective students, donors, the general public, alumni, and government agencies. At LSU our primary target audience is prospective students." The group also assessed the university's vision and mission and began to formulate key messages. Once prospective students were determined as the primary audience, the marketing team joined the LSU Office of Admissions to work toward developing an accurate comprehensive marketing message.

Sands believes that before forming marketing messages, the university has to know how its publics see it. To accomplish this, the Office of University Relations conducted a statewide random digit dialing image survey. “The results were surprising,” said Sands. “The survey revealed areas where we were weak that we did not anticipate; areas where we were strong that we did not anticipate; and we identified supporters in areas where we did not know we had them. The results let you know where you stand today. They benchmark the program and can act as a tool for evaluation. In the future, the survey can be conducted again to see if the changes you made in the marketing program worked by comparing the new opinions with the old ones.”

After conducting the image survey, University Relations had data that described the opinions of their primary audiences. “We know who our primary audiences are and how they see us; now we deliberate on how to use that information to help the university achieve its goals.

Sands continued by saying that evaluation depends on the nature of the marketing plan and how much money the department has to carry out the process. “We have to find out what happened as a result of what we did. Specific facts can help us determine the success of the plan. An example would be that if one of our goals was to increase student recruitment from certain high schools we can evaluate the success of our plan by seeing if the university did or did not have an increase in admissions or inquiries from those schools.” Evaluation is also made easier if the goals listed in the plan were attainable. If the goals are not quantifiable, then the plan should be changed. The success or failure of the effort to achieve the goals in the plan should be able to be determined. Sands also believes that it is necessary to have goals in the plan that are achievable.

Since beginning the transformation process from a reactive sending out mode to an active marketing department the University had its first large-scale marketing opportunity with the

2004 Nokia Sugar Bowl. “Two years ago, we were not positioned to undertake the sort of marketing effort that was required to market the university on a national scale,” said Sands. “Now with the growth of this department, we are able meet new challenges and successfully evaluate our successes and failures.”

The growth of the department has also enabled LSU to further establish a national presence. “In the past we haven’t marketed nationally, no one has really tried here,” said Sands. He also mentions that LSU has always relied on a strong brand for national exposure, and a major vehicle for that is athletics. “Now we have the resources to take advantage of opportunities, like the Sugar Bowl, but we don’t have the funding to sustain a national presence. It requires a \$4 to \$5 million budget to market nationally, and currently we don’t have that. We can’t stop at the Sugar Bowl. You don’t market nationally by having one article in *The New York Times*.”

To gauge its national reputation, the Office of University Relations, in conjunction with the prospective student recruitment study (2003), conducted its *Prospective Student Recruitment Study* aimed toward understanding the perceptions of out-of-state students. The study is based on an Internet survey sent to approximately 65,000 high school students. Most (36.4%) of the out-of-state respondents listed Mike the Tiger as the image most associated with LSU. Purple and gold was second (30.1%) and the stadium was third with (18.4%). Neither in-state nor out-of-state prospective students indicated sports related broadcasts as a source that they turn to for information about universities or colleges.

CHAPTER 5: UNIVERSITY RELATIONS CASE STUDY AND FINDINGS

2004 Nokia Sugar Bowl Campaign: Interview with Gene Sands

The following information was provided in a personal interview with the Executive Director of LSU's Office of University Relations, Dr. Gene Sands on May 10, 2004.

In 2003 LSU swept through the regular football season going 11-1 and was headed to the Southeastern Conference championship football game against The University of Georgia. Hype about LSU's football team began to build in the national sports media. Furthering LSU's stated goal of achieving national prominence, University Relations acted to communicate the university's academic success and Flagship Agenda to a national audience using the appearance in a major bowl game as its marketing outlet.

LSU's Chancellor Mark Emmert realized the magnitude of the Sugar Bowl event and allocated \$30,000 to the Office of University Relations for marketing. On December 8, University Relations held a staff meeting to place Sugar Bowl communication strategies at the top of their priority list. All other projects were placed on hold.

In June 2003, LSU officials pitched story ideas to *The New York Times* reporters regarding LSU's groundbreaking astrophysicist Ed Seidel. According to Sands, the reporters showed little interest in using the story. Six months later LSU was enjoying increased amounts of national exposure due to its football team's Southeastern Conference championship and, its forthcoming trip to college football's national championship game. University Relations contacted Gehrung and Associates to see if *The New York Times* was now interested in running a revised version of the story that was pitched the previous spring. They were, and an op-ed piece by LSU's Chancellor titled *Beyond a Stereotype of Southern Universities* was drafted. In the article, the Chancellor explained that although LSU excelled in athletics on Saturdays, it also

excelled in academics the other six days of the week. The Chancellor began the article by congratulating the football team but spent the rest of the piece highlighting LSU's academic achievements using groundbreaking astrophysicist Ed Seidel as an example. The main point of his piece was that although LSU embraced football and valued its success, it did not however define LSU's mission. The article ran in *The New York Times* on January 4, 2004, the same day as the Nokia Sugar Bowl. The article was then mailed to other university chancellors, provosts, and business leaders.

The New York Times ran another story pitched by University Relations regarding LSU's mentoring program for African-American student athletes. It ran on January 3, the day before the Sugar Bowl. Its title was *At LSU, a Change in the Culture*. The story highlighted African and African-American studies professor Leonard Moore whose goal was to eliminate the "outlaw, jumb-jock, sports-first culture," which he claims existed at LSU before he arrived in 1998 (Drape, 2004, para 8). The article states Moore's efforts were aided by the arrival of head football coach Nick Saban, who spearheaded the building of a \$15 million Academic Center, with a full time staff of 13 and more than 100 computers. It documents that since 2002, Moore and three colleagues have mentored 95% of LSU's black athletes through his annual workshop for freshman.

A theme was developed that would echo the articles. The theme *A Great Game Plan On and Off the Field* was created. The design of the logo featured the text "A Great Game Plan On and Off the Field" with an LSU football helmet flanking one side, and a black graduation hat flanking the other. According to Holly Houk, Director of Integrated Marketing, this was another way to say "this is not the same LSU; we are getting better all the time."

The first medium used in communicating this message was billboards. Two electronic billboards were purchased. One on College Drive, a high traffic area in Baton Rouge, and the other was on Interstate-10 between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. More non-electronic billboards were purchased on Interstate-10 and in the city of New Orleans near the Superdome. Lamar Outdoor Advertising donated the billboards, but University Relations purchased the vinyl and did the design work. The billboards had two different messages. The billboards on the interstate had more generic messages. One was *Welcome to Louisiana: Home of the LSU Tigers*. Sands believed that drivers would be going down the interstate quickly and would not have time to read long messages. The longer messages were placed on billboards in New Orleans around the Superdome where people would be stuck in traffic. This strategy maximizes the number of people who will actually read the message to the amount of dollars spent on the billboard. The longer messages included the theme “A Great Game Plan On and Off the Field” and gave several unique and positive facts about LSU, which were derived from the LSU *Did You Know* database. The Did You Know campaign was one launched previously by the Office of University Relations where brochures and pamphlets were created highlighting several positive academic-related facts about LSU. They are given to prospective students, visitors, and the media.

University Relations also needed ways to reach fans and visitors once they reached New Orleans. Senior Marketing Strategist, Robin Dunkin had the idea to use sugar packets in New Orleans’ restaurants as promotional pieces. She contacted Domino Sugar, one of the largest sugar distributors in Louisiana, and worked with them to create sugar packets that would feature the LSU logo. The package said LSU, in its customized athletic *Go Font*, with the slogan *How Sweet It Is* underneath. They also intended for the Superdome to distribute the sugar packets during the game but they declined due to licensing problems. Superdome officials also feared

fans would throw sugar in the stadium. Domino sugar paid for all of the packaging and these promotional pieces were free of charge to LSU. An estimated 36,000 sugar packets were distributed.

The third tactic was to place a two-page game day advertisement in *New Orleans Magazine*. The magazine contacted University Relations asking if they would be interested in running an ad. University Relations chose to run the ad because the magazine is distributed to every New Orleans hotel. The top of the ad said “LSU A Great Game Plan.” Under the text was an LSU football helmet with a small paragraph which said: “The LSU Tigers have developed and executed a great game plan and have become one of the top programs in the country. Now they will compete for the national title but they have won many honors along the way.” The ad then highlights the football team’s accomplishments. However, the next paragraph wraps around a black graduation cap. The text reads:

At the start of 2003, LSU announced its other winning game plan, The National Flagship Agenda. This seven-year strategy will elevate the university to a higher level of national prominence as one of the country’s leading research institutions. And while the final whistle has yet to sound, the opening drive of this plan has already netted some spectacular gains.

The gains listed are bulleted underneath the paragraph. They are:

- Expanding research opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students
- Adding 150 new faculty positions
- Increasing the number of nationally competitive programs

The bottom of the ad says, “On and Off the Field,” which finishes the theme “A Great Game Plan On and Off the Field.”

Examples of the outdoor and print advertisements developed for the campaign can be seen in Appendix B.

Finally, the LSU Chancellor and other LSU officials participated in radio talk shows. Also, the athletic department coordinated radio talk shows featuring LSU's football coaches, players, and trainers.

University Relations also used radio due to its reach and affordability. They purchased a package from WWL, which reaches 38 states nationally after sundown. Radio spots were crafted that functioned as audio versions of the billboards featuring positive academic facts from the Did You Know database. They were academically oriented, using the A Great Game Plan On and Off the Field theme, with a football spin. Each radio spot began with a football fact to attract the listener and followed with a positive academic fact. Nine spots were crafted. Following is one of the spots used:

The LSU Tigers have reached the championship level by recruiting the best.... but did you know that LSU has increased academic standards five times in recent years, and each time enrollment has increased? LSU has a winning game plan on and off the field!

The radio spots were produced in the Office of University Relations. The Governor-elect of Louisiana also added a radio spot on WWL in which she supported LSU, welcomed the fans, and promoted economic development in Louisiana. University Relations also used the LSU website during the campaign. The "A Great Game Plan on and Off the Field" theme was the center highlight of the homepage. Under the logo was a link to learn more about the picture. The story, which appears after clicking on the learn more about this photo option leads with the announcement that LSU has been crowned as college football's national champion. However the third paragraph read:

LSU football is not the school's only program with a winning strategy. In January 2003, the University launched its National Flagship Agenda—a seven-year plan to bring LSU to a higher level of national prominence as one of the country's leading research institutions. The agenda includes assessing peer institutions and developing key objectives to accomplish by 2010, LSU's 150th anniversary. Although the campaign is still in its early stages, significant progress has already been made.

The homepage also featured *e cards* called *Tiger Greetings*, LSU wallpapers, and LSU screensavers. Of the 23 Tiger Greetings, the first nine are athletically oriented. Of the 18 LSU wallpapers, the first 13 featured scenes from the SEC and national championship games. And one of the two screensavers is athletically oriented. The LSU homepage, which is academically oriented, also featured a link in the to the LSU sports website. The right hand side of the homepage featured links to receive information about the following areas of LSU: Admissions, The Flagship Agenda, E Cards, and LSU Athletics. See Table 1 for the total budget.

Budget Breakdown

Lamar Billboard	\$8,458 (vinyl production/placement) (space was donated)
Lamar Billboard	\$1,350 (electronic board)
WWL Radio	\$8,525
NO Magazine	\$3,000
Game Day program	\$7,500
Radio Production	\$2,063
University Homepage	\$ 0 (controlled media)
Total	\$30, 896

Weaknesses

Time and budget constraints were the weaknesses of the campaign. “The nature of championship sports allows marketers only a certain amount of time before they know if their team is going to participate in a championship game or series,” said Sands. “At the beginning of the season we did not anticipate that the football team would be going to the national championship. Although we knew we had a very good team, we did not believe they would achieve the level of success that they did this year.” According to Sands, University Relations

was structured to market such an event, but the lack of time for preplanning weighed heavily on their options.

The budget of the campaign also was a weakness. To give an example of what \$30,000 will buy, it costs \$500,000 to run a single, one-page advertisement in *The New York Times*. This had the most effect on how the plan was designed. “We had previously placed a full ad in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* saying that we were expanding the university by creating one hundred fifty new positions. That created a positive national buzz in the academic community about LSU. It would have been nice to do it again during the Sugar Bowl campaign. We would have loved placing that ad in major national newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Chicago Tribune*, but we couldn’t afford it,” said Sands.

Recommendations

After navigating an academic campaign using athletics, Sands provided the following recommendations:

- Build a contingency fund early (\$150, 000) before the team goes to the bowl game.
- Hire a media buyer to negotiate advertising spots.
- Develop a theme early to unite athletics and academics.
- Use the Chancellor, Head Coach, Athletic Director, or players to appear on national talk shows like Jay Leno, David Letterman, and NBC’s *Morning Show*.

Evaluation

According to Houk there are no plans to conduct a formal evaluation of the campaign; however they do plan to incorporate, in similar campaigns, the results of a survey they conducted of Louisiana residents. The survey included questions regarding the perceived value of success in athletics and a national championship. In 2004 the Office of University Relations, in

collaboration with the Public Policy Research Lab, conducted a series of annual Louisiana Surveys designed to establish benchmarks and assess progress and regressions in resident assessments of state government services. The survey was a telephone survey of 1,022 randomly selected Louisiana residents 18 years or older. It included several split ballot questions in which approximately half of the respondents were asked a particular series of questions. Section sixteen of the report was titled *Perceived Value of a Success in Athletics and a National Championship*.

To gauge the impact of LSU's national championship, the survey asked respondents whether the championship made LSU a better academic university, improved the state economy, or made the state a better place to live. Half the sample received more generic questions regarding perceived success in academics due to sports achievements. The other half received specific questions regarding perceived success in academics due to sports achievements. The survey found that, overall, 58% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that LSU's national championship makes for a better academic university. Question wording did make a difference, as respondents were more likely to agree that with the statement regarding success in athletics over winning a national championship. Fully 65% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that success in college athletics makes for a better academic university compared to 50.4% who agreed when asked specifically about the national championship. More educated respondents were less likely to perceive the link between athletic success academics. Almost 72% of respondents with less than a high school education believed athletic success makes for a better academic university compared to 58.4% with a college degree.

CHAPTER 6: PERSPECTIVES ON ACADEMIC MARKETING VIA ATHLETICS

Office of University Relations: Holly Houk, Robin Dunkin

When asked if it has been a strategy to use sports to highlight academic achievements at LSU, Houk says no. “The athletic department has always made it a point to highlight the athletes’ academic achievements, but until the 2004 Sugar Bowl this office has not actively tried to unite athletics and academics,” said Houk.

Dunkin, however, believes that even though a conscious attempt had not been made in the Office of University Relations, the union between the two began at LSU with the arrival of Chancellor Mark Emmert in July of 1999. “The Chancellor has referred to athletics as the ‘front porch’ of the university. His mentality is that if that is what it takes to get people interested in LSU then fine,” said Dunkin. Both Dunkin and Houk believe that although there is enthusiasm about all sports at LSU; football generates the most excitement and has the most marketing potential. In fact, Dunkin says University Relations, prior to the Sugar Bowl appearance, probably would not have launched such a campaign if an LSU team from a different sport reached its championship game. “We would have done some things. We would have posted something on the website, but nothing much more than that” said Houk. She says it boils down to marketing principles. “We have to maximize the ratio of money we spend to the amount of people who hear our message. College football is so large that people from all over are watching and listening. The enormity of the event is such that you have to take advantage of the opportunity.”

Dunkin believes there are risks in using athletics to market academics in higher education. She says the university runs the risk of looking like its priorities are misplaced. “You can look like you’re all about football,” said Dunkin. “That is why we worked so hard while

brainstorming for the Sugar Bowl campaign. We had to acknowledge and address that risk, hence the theme “A Great Game Plan on and Off the Field.””

Both Houk and Dunkin believe that although athletics are a great outlet for LSU to gain national coverage, there are other ways to highlight LSU in the eyes of the academic community. Events like the President of the United States giving the commencement speech at graduation or a professor winning the Noble prize or making a discovery give LSU a lot of prestige in the national media. Although there are other ways to get national coverage, Houk believes athletics are still a good way to increase name recognition. Dunkin says that the types of stories University Relations sent out during the Sugar Bowl plant a seed in peoples’ minds that the university is progressing toward academic distinction. Houk cites the op-ed piece written by the Chancellor for *The New York Times* as an example of how this was done. That story was mailed to the Chancellor’s peers including other Chancellors and University Presidents, Provosts, Deans of Enrollment, and numerous others, including legislators, community and business leaders, etc., both in-state and out-of-state. “We wanted to communicate with these influential individuals that LSU is a university on the move. We are a progressive, dynamic, and changing institution, with top-notch faculty, students and ideas,” said Houk. She believes that mailing the piece to these people gave University Relations a chance to increase top of mind awareness of LSU in addition to touting LSU’s strengths and recent achievements.

After circulating the story, Dunkin and Houk say the number of people who saw and read it was overwhelming. They say they have heard several positive remarks regarding LSU since the campaign. “People are saying ‘it’s about time’ LSU does this,” said Dunkin. Dunkin and Houk also say there has been no criticism from the LSU community or the media regarding the use of athletics to market academics.

Dunkin and Houk believe the campaign was a success for several reasons. According to Houk there had been interest from the faculty and staff regarding how University Relations' marketed LSU nationally. "This raised awareness around the university about what University Relations does," said Houk. "We were able to show our internal audiences how our department serves the mission of the university on a national level, while celebrating athletic achievements and highlighting the progression of the university to our external audiences." Dunkin says that since the Sugar Bowl victory University Relations have had more requests for LSU gear and promotional items from fans and prospective students than ever.

Even though Houk considers the campaign a success, she believes a similar campaign can be done better in the future. "Time and money were such huge factors for us," said Houk. "We will talk with athletics about having a plan for these things in the future where University Relations, the Athletic Department and Licensing and Trademark are the players. If we have a budget set aside, and open communication among these departments, we can do even more the next time." Planning in advance for the types of promotional things such as print ads, outdoor, web, special events, TV, radio, media relations, etc. is what she considers most important. "We do wish to marry the concepts of academics and athletics. For instance, a plan that addresses the types of promotions we might want to do if we win an SEC championship, a national championship, other championships—and what things we would do for what sports," said Houk.

Office of the President: William Jenkins

Jenkins believes marketing can play a vital role in heightening the academic perception of the university, however he holds that the quality of the product (research, education, and public service) will dictate its success. "I believe continued improvement in faculty and student education is the only true way to break the perception of Southern universities," said Jenkins.

When asked if sports exposure provides LSU with the best outlet to communicate its academic achievements to national audiences, Jenkins says it depends on what is meant by national audiences. "If you mean popular mass audiences, then athletics provides us a wonderful opportunity to spread LSU's academic news, even though their receptivity is questionable," said Jenkins. However, he believes receptivity among popular mass audiences can be heightened regarding academic/research achievements if they fulfill one of three criteria: first, best, or unique. Conversely, Jenkins believes if other university administrators define national audiences, then he is not sure if athletic success helps to a great degree. "In my experience, my national colleagues are somewhat engaged in athletics, but are more focused on research dollars and academic programs. This also happens to be the group that votes on the *U.S. News and World Report* reputation rankings. Since this group is generally not much for athletics and can pick apart any claim designed for a general mass audience, I have some doubts that advertising academics through athletics has any great effect."

Although advertising academics through athletics may not have a great effect on other university administrators, Jenkins still believes sports exposure provides a valuable rare instance where LSU is represented as a single entity to a national audience. "The three-letter LSU moniker is now widely known and we can use that as a tool to open dialogue with the media and other opinion leaders. Dr. Emmert used the Sugar Bowl to talk about the changing nature of Southern universities. During that exciting time and the afterglow, LSU could easily garner more attention because everyone was very familiar with the university. However, Jenkins holds that since LSU has moved beyond that afterglow period it has to move more aggressively to continue its goal to reach national prominence. He believes LSU can still use the national championship as

a connection point, but has to avoid appearing too dependent on just athletic success. “We have to say ‘LSU is great in athletics, but we are also great in,’” said Jenkins.

Athletic Department: Tommy Karam, Herb Vincent

One of the benefits of using athletics to market academics is the reach of athletic coverage. When asked if the reach generated through sports is a good marketing outlet, Karam says the answer is simple. “The test is to look at the events of Saturday in Baton Rouge. Even if you aren’t a sports fan, game information will reach you. You will know who LSU is playing, etc. because it will be on the front page of the newspaper, on television, and on the radio. The reach is tremendous,” said Karam, who also is a sports marketing professor. He believes sports are important to a large number of people, but does however acknowledge that there is probably a small percent of people who feel sports are totally insignificant. The sports messages, he says, probably do not reach this group. Because of this reach, branding through sports is a marketing initiative that’s being employed by private companies as well as public universities. According to Karam, companies are always trying to associate themselves with other entities that exemplify their values. However, if an athlete is chosen to champion a message it is important to realize that his or her personal life will be publicized as well as his or her professional life. The problem in branding through sports is athletes who seem like good spokespersons can suddenly fall under a negative light in the media. If the athlete is accused of a crime, or creates any negative press during his or her spokesman-ship, the company takes on all the negatives attached with that athlete. Kobe Bryant is an example. His sponsors were forced to drop him because they didn’t want to be associated with his off-the-court problems.

Karam believes the very nature of professional sports can make some consumers wary of the sincerity of an athlete due to their exorbitant salaries and often negatively portrayed

lifestyles. However, although college athletes can present the same problems, college sports as a whole carries a more positive connotation. Since college athletes aren't paid, most people view amateur sports as a pure game where the athletes play for the love of the sport. Also, it is not the players who are marketed; it is the team, the sports experience, and the excitement. There is camaraderie in college sports where fans and former graduates dispersed throughout the country remember the passion and intensity they experienced at sporting events at their alma mater. These positive associations make college athletics an attractive marketing vehicle in higher education; however Karam believes there are other factors that should be considered before making that connection. The team should be winning, and the schools athletics should have a positive national image. If a university's athletics fit that description, Karam believes athletics are a viable academic marketing vehicle.

Karam says University Relations is enhancing the perception of the LSU brand by using the halo, which LSU's football team created during its championship season. He is referring to the *Halo Effect*, which occurs when a spokesperson or representative who's associated with an organization is recognized for success. That organization will take on all positives associated with that representative. For example, after winning his sixth consecutive Tour De France, all sponsors of Lance Armstrong share his glory. Their products taste better, smell better, and work better in the eyes of the consumer. The LSU football team being crowned the Bowl Championship Series national champion places a halo around LSU, and its academics also may be seen as better.

Karam offers another reason LSU should co-brand athletics with academics: LSU's head football coach, Nick Saban. Since he consistently speaks publicly about his belief in the importance of academics for the athletes, Karam believes people associate that attitude to be

uniform in all departments at LSU. “It is a very natural marriage; it has been tested and proven that LSU football sells,” said Karam. “Attaching academics with athletics at LSU is attaching a winner with a winner. LSU sports can help sell to new audiences a good product in LSU academics.” He believes the co-branding has already started in the eyes of the fans and sports media since Saban has been so outspoken about his emphasis on the importance of success in academics for athletes. The Sugar Bowl was an opportunity for the national media to hear that message. He agrees with the university using that forum as a bridge to communicate LSU’s vision.

Karam says one way athletics can improve the academic image of the university is by selecting successful student-athletes to represent LSU in the sports media. “You identify those individuals on the team with academic credentials who you can put in front of the camera to represent the university in a positive manner,” said Karam. “Instead of announcing your starting center on TV or at events as Joe Albergamo, you announce him as the Academic All-American Joe Albergamo.” Although Karam hesitates to say sports coverage is the best outlet for a university to gain national coverage, he does acknowledge that is the most efficient and cost effective due to the reach versus cost ratio. “It reaches so many people, and it’s free,” says Karam. “I do think the university has to be careful about which message is emphasized more. I think you should package it as ‘a university’ and adjacently say ‘by the way, we are good at sports’,” said Karam. He believes universities can go down two different roads when using athletics to market academics. “A university can be seen as just a football school if it uses athletics as its primary and only message,” said Karam. He says that a school can avoid that by using instead its athletics as a door for academic promotion. Then there is an entirely different result. “Some universities when you see their logo, you think just football, or basketball etc.

However when you see others, you think about them as having good sports and academics. That is what LSU is capable of.”

Karam agrees with Dunkin and Houk that the dangers of using athletics to market academics is running the risk of looking like the university’s primary concern is athletics. He adds that athletic failure or scandal could bring unwanted scrutiny to the university and, according to Karam, tarnish the halo, which would damage the overall brand of the university. However, Karam is confident that if either of the two were to occur, a university would be able to handle the situation. “These things don’t happen overnight; it takes time. There would be enough time that the right individuals would have the opportunity to re-sculpt the message. Although when situations such as those that have happened at the University of Colorado hit loud and hard, it still has a rather lengthy ‘shelf life.’ It usually takes weeks or many months before it is resolved. This should give every organization time to re-shape or re-sculpt their public message and, therefore, their public image. So yes, even knowing the danger, it is still a good idea.”

Risks and benefits considered, Karam believes that sports are a viable academic marketing tool in higher education. “If coordinated properly it could be as effective as any marketing tool. When your sports teams rise to the top you make that your temporary marketing emphasis. But if the sports program begins to lose or becomes surrounded by scandal, then stop the association and begin marketing only academics,” said Karam. “Having a great sports program is an added marketing bonus. Many universities would love to have this tool.”

Vincent agrees with Karam that athletics can be used to support the academic mission of the university and improve its academic perception by highlighting the academic achievements of the athletes. “Athletics are covered heavily. When we can get coverage, we have coaches talk

about the academic success of the players, and they stress the importance of education,” said Vincent. The LSU sports website features photos of graduating players in their cap and gown. LSU also has an academic center for student athletes, which recognizes a student-athlete of the month. Vincent says the athletic department sends press releases to the media notifying them of the recipient. Media guides also are published for each sport that is distributed to the media and recruits, which are full of facts about the university, the city, the students, and the athletes. Its purpose is to promote the university and to paint a picture of the culture of the city. In addition, Vincent says members of the athletic department meet with national sports media when they cover LSU to reiterate that information so they may bring up those facts on the air.

Although he agrees with Karam, Houk, and Dunkin that LSU athletics should be associated with academics, he believes that the athletic side and the academic side of the university should have separate, distinct identities. Each uses its own font and symbols. LSU athletics uses the *Go* font and LSU academics uses *Goudi* font. He believes it is important that athletics are not seen as overshadowing the true mission of the university. “In the grand scheme of things sports enhance school spirit and are a large part of the collegiate experience, but does not define the university’s mission,” said Vincent.

Like Karam, Houk, and Dunkin, Vincent says sports are not the best way for a university with successful sports to gain national coverage, but is the most effective. “Ideally it shouldn’t be, but that is just the way society is. Because of the reach and popularity of college sports, the success or failure LSU sports have a lot to do with the way the average person views the university,” says Vincent. He says the benefit of the exposure is that the university gains fans and support from across the globe. Also, he explains that sports are a good thing for people to read about. “It is a better representation for the city and the university if people read about LSU’s

football team playing for the national championship as opposed to reading about escalating HIV cases in Baton Rouge etc.”

Vincent considers the danger of using sports as an academic marketing vehicle is having poorly performing student-athletes represent the academic quality of the university in the sports media. However, he says, “If the athletic department supports the academic mission of the university, and there are achieving student-athletes, then athletics are a great academic marketing tool in higher education.”

Vincent agrees with Houk that the Athletic Department and University Relations should work more closely in the future. Vincent said during the Sugar Bowl University Relations passed its message to the Athletic Department, who would give it to the sports radio and television personalities. Vincent believes more pre-planning in the future between the two offices would give University Relations more of an opportunity to interact with the sports media. “Although our audiences are different, I believe it would be effective,” said Vincent.

LSU Foundation: Cecil Phillips

In the 2004 winter edition of *Cornerstone*, a publication devoted to the benefactors of the LSU Foundation, Phillips writes that the national spotlight gained through the national championship warms the fundraising climate at LSU. Phillips begins his piece by asking the question: Will LSU’s national championship in football help the University’s fundraising programs? His answer: “You bet it will!” (Phillips, 2004, para 1) He continues by saying that all good news about LSU, no matter what it is, helps foster philanthropic support. Phillips says that much like financial investors, donors like to see a positive outlook, and they like to go with winners. Even donors who are primarily interested in the University’s academic programs enjoyed the great attention that LSU gained from playing in the championship game and the

excitement of coming out on top. He writes that although many of LSU's other programs in academics, athletics, research, the arts, and public service rank high in their respective fields—some of them are known worldwide. But for sheer intensity of public attention, it is hard to beat the tens of millions of eyes on television and on the covers of national magazines attracted by the Fighting Tigers.

At LSU there are three fundraising operations: the LSU Foundation, the LSU Alumni Association, and the Tiger Athletic Foundation (TAF). The LSU Foundation is a nonprofit, tax-exempt foundation comprising business, professional, and civic leaders concerned with the advancement of LSU. The purpose of the Foundation is to foster financial support for LSU, the LSU Agricultural Center, The Law Center, and the Office of the President of the LSU System. According to Phillips the foundation deals with large gifts to the university, which are in the million to multi-million dollar range.

Phillips says there is so many things that people respond to, but the vision for the university expressed by the Chancellor is what drives most of the larger donations. “Those people take a look at the top; they ask ‘who is leading the university?’ If that sounds good to them, then they will make their donation. If they have a negative view of the university, they won’t,” said Phillips. He believes all good news, including success in athletics, about LSU helps the foundation and affects the climate for philanthropy. “Faculty members and students who win awards, and athletic teams who win games is all good news for LSU, which enhances its image. Likewise bad news, like the death of a student, or troubled athletes can hurt that image,” said Phillips.

Phillips makes the distinction clear between the LSU Foundation and the Tiger Athletic Foundation. “You must remember that donations for athletics go to TAF. Donations to the LSU

Foundation come in the name of academics,” said Phillips. He says that success in sports doesn’t translate into academic gifts, however he believes it is part of the overall climate for giving to the foundation. “I don’t ever remember a donor ever not giving because the football team was losing. The people giving large amounts to us want to improve the quality of academic work at LSU,” says Phillips. “Sports doesn’t have a direct effect on that, but it does make the overall brand of LSU more attractive.” He agrees that LSU should co-brand athletics with academics. “LSU is LSU and that includes athletics.”

Phillips says the LSU Foundation has not made a conscious effort to use the national championship to prompt more donations. Instead the LSU Foundation uses the vision of the Chancellor. “If people like the direction of the university, and its leadership they are more likely to make a donation,” said Phillips. If a potential donor is a football fan he might like LSU a little more because Chancellor Emmert hired Nick Saban. Phillips believes that can improve the image of the university to that donor and color his image of the Chancellor. “I do remember a donor who loves football donated because he thought the Chancellor made a good decision to hire Saban,” said Phillips. He continues by saying that donors to the LSU Foundation are like investors. They consider who the leaders of the company are. Big donors look at the CEO and the direction of the company. In higher education the choice of football coach helps color the image and direction of the university.

Phillips says there is not a direct relationship between philanthropy to the LSU Foundation and athletic success. He says his counterparts at other universities have said they have not seen a direct relationship either. He believes athletic giving increases due to sports success but he cannot attribute any specific gift to the Foundation due to the national championship.

Outside Interviews: Mark DiPietro, Don Hale

LSU hired Gehrung and Associates, a media placement firm, to assist them in placing stories in national media outlets. DiPietro, the account executive who handles LSU for Gehrung, believes that using athletics to market academics in higher education is a double-edge sword. He says the perception for a school like LSU is that it is a jock factory. The danger of using athletics is that it can reinforce that perception. There are also purists in higher education who believe academics don't mix with athletics. However, DiPietro believes that negative perception can be used to the advantage of the school. "You use the negative perception at first to get attention, but then you can build off that by presenting the university correctly," said DiPietro. He uses the *At LSU, a Change in the Culture* piece as an example. "To get the Leonard Moore story national, we had to use the negative perception, which is playing off the jock factory thing to get the attention. Because of the athletic interest in LSU, University Relations were able present a story touting LSU's academics using sports as the lead.

DiPietro says by using the name recognition generated through athletic coverage is how LSU can use sports to gain national academic exposure "Having media showing your logo, the location of your campus, etc. is a good starting point," said DiPietro. He explains that attention can be used as a starting point for communicating other messages. "For LSU, the 2004 Sugar Bowl was a great start. You take that media are coming to cover sports and find ways to connect them with the rest of the university." Attention that is gained through sports can be directed at academic aspects of the university. "You connect them with the Chancellor, and let him introduce new information which they may want to write about later. It's like you are saying 'Hey, while you're here,'" said DiPietro. Stories were athletically oriented but pointed to academics. He said that strategy was used with the media in the weeks before LSU's appearance

in the Sugar Bowl. Although it was successful, DiPietro says reporters still want to take a look first at things like graduation rates, etc. before writing. Even if it takes time, DiPietro believes the university is slowly changing the jock factory image.

DiPietro agrees that sports are not the best outlet for national coverage, but he believes it is a very good one due to the automatic name recognition it generates. “Since people know your name you are not starting from ground zero. Now you can say, ‘you know LSU football now let me tell you about how the athletes learn,’” said DiPietro. “You have a wide range of tools for marketing. What we do is to zero in on good programs at a university and tie them into the national news. At LSU, football was being covered, so we found a way to wedge the school into the coverage as part of it.”

If the athletic program is not involved in scandal and seems to be running a classy program, then DiPietro believes that translates into improved perception of the university’s academics. “Since the football program is being covered, as is the case at LSU, it is a reflection of the university,” said DiPietro. He does, however, say that demand for academically related LSU stories by the national media has not changed since its national championship. He says a good story will sell itself regardless of name recognition. “But, the name LSU might perk up the ears of reporters now more than before. Academic reporters don’t care about sports victories. They care more about meeting the man who runs a university like LSU,” said DiPietro. He believes the football championship doesn’t affect the media perception, but he says he thinks it does change public perception.

DiPietro says other universities that he has worked with in the past have used athletics to market academics and been successful. In his experience as an Account Executive; he has seen sports as a viable academic marketing tool in higher education. “Yes absolutely, using it as a

springboard can redirect attention,” says DiPietro. He says the dangers of being stereotyped are already built in. “If you already have a negative reputation as being a football school you can’t lose anything by redirecting the spotlight.”

The University of Texas at Austin (UT), which won the baseball World Series in 2002 and has a national athletic identity, does very little to associate athletics and academics. Unlike LSU, UT’s Office of University Relations has no connection with the athletic department. According to Don Hale, Vice President for Public Affairs, they collaborate with the media relations and promotions department in athletics only when there is a crisis to be managed, not when an athletic team is going to a bowl game or a World Series. “We are proud of our athletic program, but wins and losses have nothing to do with promoting our institutional values and brand,” said Hale. The University of Texas at Austin does not place academically oriented commercials during televised sporting events because it can only have impact if the university’s got the deep pockets to sustain it over time which, according to Hale, the University of Texas at Austin doesn’t have.

Hale agrees with Vincent that athletics and academics are two different components at Division 1 institutions. He says the brand for the education and research enterprise might be conveyed by athletics, but athletics are a relatively small piece of the brand strategy. All Division 1 schools have non-revenue sports in which the participants are true student-athletes that have no pro contracts in their future. Hale believes that publicizing the activities and accomplishments of the outstanding student-athletes, and highlighting them in the media controlled by the university, such as publications, Web sites and e-newsletters is where an institution can connect its athletic program with the academic side of the house. He says while their athletic achievements give

them a level of celebrity; the focus of these promotions is on their achievements off the playing field.

Hale believes Division 1 sports can do basically two things that connect to promoting an institution: 1) They build name recognition, and 2) connect an institution more broadly to its surrounding community in a way that education and research cannot. Sports can provide a platform for communication that is not available through other means. Like Vincent and Karam he believes a university can best promote its sports teams by focusing on initiatives that go beyond the playing field. Athletes and coaches, who participate in community outreach efforts, visit hospitals and work on volunteer projects can have a positive influence on how a university is perceived by the public and elected officials. However he does not agree with Karam that scandal in the media related to athletics has a relatively short shelf life. He holds that athletes and coaches who make news in a negative fashion as a result of legal troubles, recruiting scandals and the like can do great damage to a university's reputation that can take years to overcome. A national scandal invariably changes the conversation about the institution. It's so high profile it can become the butt of jokes on Letterman or the *Tonight Show*. Further, it reflects poorly on the alumni. The public, which knows little else of about the institution, connects the university's name with the scandal. In some cases, Hale believes, it can define the institution.

Because of the depth of sports coverage, Hale says a university who wishes to market academics through athletics has to determine if its programs hold up to scrutiny. "Does it support your position as a leading academic institution? Because of its high profile, one problem or issue in athletics can override all of the good that has gone before, particularly if you make claims that are shown to be false by something that occurs in the athletics program," said Hale. "

He does believe big-time sports are the easiest way for institutions to gain national name recognition because athletics can provide a platform for communications that is unavailable any other way and they build name recognition. However, he believes sports are not the only way to gain name recognition. He says that most higher education institutions in the U.S. that don't have Division 1 sports programs are working on simple name recognition right now.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

Discussion of Research Questions

How can LSU use its positive national sports exposure to achieve further national prominence? Attention generated through athletic success provided LSU with a bridge to unite athletic success with its academic success in the national media. Through this athletic achievement LSU was able to explain in *Beyond a Stereotype of Southern Universities*, and *At LSU, a Change in the Culture*, that LSU achieves a high level of success academically as well as athletically. Further, having stories in *The New York Times* gives LSU an added level of prestige in the eyes of its peers.

Secondly, it provides LSU with name recognition through countless uses of its logo, and mention of the location of its campus in the media. Additionally sports success creates demand for promotional items bearing the LSU name and logo, which provides further opportunities to expand the reach of the LSU name through licensing. Sports success attracts national sports equipment and apparel companies that want to produce LSU items. In the 2003-04 fiscal year Nike USA Inc. was LSU's top licensee. LSU's sports teams also appear in top-selling video games that are sold nationally like EA sports NCAA Football 2004, which sold more than 1 million units last year, and NCAA March Madness 2004. These companies extend LSU's product distribution channels.

Sports success also presents co-branding opportunities with current cultural icons. In 2003, the Collegiate Licensing Company (CLC), the Atlanta-based firm that handles LSU's licensing interests, partnered with *Nickelodeon* to create LSU/SpongeBob plush items from Applause and apparel items from S&E Sportswear. Also, Coca-Cola saluted LSU football by producing promotional bottles with the LSU logo. Other national companies such as PEZ have

produced LSU products. These co-branding initiatives, which exist as a result of sports success, further enhance the prestige and reach of the LSU brand.

Finally, the success of LSU's football team will lead to national advertising opportunities for the Office of University Relations. The likelihood that LSU football games will be nationally televised has increased since it won the national championship furthering LSU's marketing reach. LSU can use this chance to promote its academic message by creating 30-second ad spots which will be seen by national audiences compared to the regional audiences they reached in the past.

Does sports exposure provide LSU with the best outlet to communicate its academic achievements? No. All the participants in this study agreed athletic coverage is not the best means to gain academic exposure, but is the most efficient due to the number of people who will see the logo and hear the messages associated with it. Almost 24 million watched the 2004 Nokia Sugar Bowl; a record 79,342 attended the game and an estimated 5,000 to 50,000 additional visitors came to New Orleans without tickets. Branding literature shows the public equates a high profile with quality. Success in sports provides the perception of quality of the overall brand and should be used by university marketing departments as a moment of truth to make a powerful national impression. A championship heightens prestige of the brand name and can create brand loyalty from fans across the globe.

LSU After a National Championship: An Evaluation of Student Enrollment, Licensing Revenue, and Position in *U.S. News and World Report's* College Rankings

Student Enrollment

According to the LSU Office of Student Recruitment, the 2004 incoming freshman class is one of the largest in LSU history. The following has occurred in student recruitment since 2003:

- A 367% increase in visitors to recruiting services
- A 30% increase in campus tours
- An 11% increase in returned prospective student information cards.
- A 28% increase in recruitment prospects
- A 68% increase in recruitment reception attendance
- A 51% increase in the number of telephone calls to the Office of Student Recruitment.

Licensing Revenue

LSU's gross royalty total of almost \$3 million, generated during the 2003-2004 fiscal year is its highest fiscal year royalty total. According to the Collegiate Licensing Company, this total was greatly impacted due to its football national championship, representing an increase of over \$2 million, or 208%, when compared to the total royalties generated last fiscal year. Factoring out all conference and national championship royalties collected this fiscal year; LSU's standard royalties increased 81%. CLC also reported that LSU moved from number 21 up to number five on its list of top selling universities between 2003 and 2004.

U.S. News and World Report Ranking

LSU remains in Tier 3 status in the 2005 *U.S. News and World Report* college ranking. Its final overall score remained the same at 36, while its final rank moved from 135 to 136. However, its academic reputation rank moved up from 125 to 124.

Discussion of Enrollment, Revenue, and Ranking

The increase in licensing is not only to be directly attributed to LSU's football national championship, but is to be associated with the increased image of LSU in the national media where success in sports has heightened the prestige of the LSU name creating a halo around the brand. Further increases in student enrollment and prospective student inquiries are aided by increased name recognition sports success provides. School leaders credit aggressive recruiting and an improved academic reputation for these increases, and do acknowledge that publicity surrounding the football team also is a factor in the increase. Sentell (2004) reports out-of-state students, which may account for 15% of the student body this year, are saying they took notice when LSU's football team won the national championship. One student said, "A lot of people are coming for the football championship" (Sentell, 2004, para 17).

LSU's failure to move into top tier status in the *U.S. News and World Report* ranking of colleges does not indicate that academic marketing through athletics is not viable. It does however indicate that academic reputation is slow to build. In fact, although a modest move, LSU's improvement in the academic reputation category illustrates this point. It also indicates increased recognition of LSU amongst its peers, which could be attributed to University Relations effort to distribute the academic related stories, generated through sports, to various university leaders.

Bridging the Gap: Using Athletics to Promote Academics

LSU can use national athletic exposure to associate the excellence achieved through one facet of the university with the rest of its product. Participants in this study believe associating winning athletics with academics heightens the perception of the university's academics, while 65% of respondents to LSU's survey either agreed or strongly agreed that success in college athletics makes for a better academic university. Further, as noted by Phillips, success in sports also can warm the climate for philanthropy, which furthers a university's drive to increase private funding on a national level.

Since winning the football national championship LSU has realized a 208% increase in licensing royalties, student enrollment has reached record numbers, and its academic reputation ranking in the U.S. News and World Reports ranking of colleges has increased. This indicates that athletics are a viable academic marketing vehicle in higher education.

Name Recognition and Building the Complete Brand

As noted by Dr. Sevier (2002), great brands know their reputation. Southern universities, like LSU and the University of Tennessee, have engaged in environmental scanning and found the symbols that define them locally and nationally are athletic in nature. These universities, and others who find the same results, can embrace and celebrate athletic success while using it as a vehicle for name recognition and promotion. However, as indicated by participants in this study, there are dangers in co-branding athletics and academics. Recruiting scandals, and player misconduct can lead headlines and make national news. Universities who wish to use athletics to aid in academic promotion must decide if their athletics programs hold up to scrutiny. They should examine their coaches, and players to see if their image is one that the university wants to have associated with its academic prowess. Just as athletic success can provide a halo around the

universities brand, athletic scandal can diminish it. However, association between athletics and academics does not have to be long-term. Universities can use a sports championship as a temporary marketing emphasis where the university rides the success of its team in the national media. It does not have to sustain that association over time.

If a university decides to use sports as a supplementary vehicle to champion its academic message, sports can provide two key elements in the marketing mix: place and promotion. Sports broadcasts set the scene before games with shots of the campus and surrounding city landmarks. These visuals aid in promotion of place while shots of the crowd evoke the emotion associated with sports at that school. Associating academic messages with the sporting event will present the complete brand to national audiences by presenting a more global view of the university, while at the same time not letting athletic messages define the university in the mass media. Universities that have nationally recognized athletic programs can embrace them as part of what makes their product unique. Sevier believes emotions drive most buying decisions, and a good brand finds a way to attach itself to that emotion through experience. The excitement associated with college sports creates that emotion, while countless mentions of place on the air or in print, makes the excitement of the game part of the universities product. This promotion of place and product will not alone improve perception of the academic quality of the university, but will generate more interest in its academic offering providing university marketers an outlet to communicate academic messages to a mass audience.

This work is not suggesting that sports should be the only vehicle used to market academics. It assumes university marketers will use other, more related marketing outlets like trade journals as primary academic marketing outlets. However, this thesis suggests that athletics provide a viable supplementary marketing outlet due to its reach. First, academic marketing

through sports is proactive marketing and branding, because it allows the university to define itself through controlled media. Further, it provides university communicators the opportunity to reach a mass audience due to the sheer volume of people who follow sports and the depth in which sports are covered. Finding ways to link the university's sports success to the academic mission of the university will give the university opportunities to promote its vision. One of the ways to accomplish this, as suggested by participants in this study, is to display achieving student-athletes as models of academic success in the media. As noted by Stepp, newsroom resources are shrinking in all but one category: sports. Using successful student-athletes in the media will bridge the gap between successful sports and successful academics by coloring the true mission of the university in the eye of the public.

A university can create a dumb-jock, sports-first reputation by having touted athletics, poorly performing student-athletes and lagging graduation rates. It also can exist if the university's only national exposure comes through sports. Universities can choose to support that sports-first image, or they can use athletics as a marketing vehicle to promote the complete brand. Football teams who win will always be covered in the national media, so the athletic news will always surface. Using sports as an academic marketing tool can only distance the institution from that image.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study. First, the case study revolved around a Southern university where football is prominent. Not every region values sports success as much as the South. If a university in a different section of the country used sports to market itself academically, it might not realize the same result as LSU.

Secondly, LSU had a distinct marketing advantage by having the championship game only 75 miles away. This provided the university with the home-field marketing advantage. The campaign might have been different if the game had been held in Pasadena, California. Another limitation is that this was the national championship game. All the bowl games get media attention, but none get as much as the national championship game. Also, the other major bowl games are played on the same day and the championship game is played then there are no other bowl games so there is competing coverage. Having the game set apart from the others provide a marketing advantage to LSU.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE EXAMPLES

1. Specifically, is there a concentrated advertising/marketing effort that is uniform throughout the whole university, or does each department have its own public relations/marketing/advertising rights?
2. What is done to make sure that the advertising done by LSU is consistent? How much control does the Office of University Relations have?
3. What are the dangers of message inconsistency? Externally, what are the biggest threats to having inconsistent messages?
4. Have there been any responses to academic marketing through sports? Have there been any comments or criticisms from the media, etc...?
5. Has it been a strategy to use sports to point to academic achievements at LSU?
6. Are the dangers of using sports to market academics?
7. What were some of the challenges faced by electronic media, media relations, publications-design, and marketing departments in the Office of University Relations during the campaign?
8. How did the departments work together?
9. What was the goal of the marketing campaign at LSU before the Sugar Bowl appearance?
10. What was the goal of marketing efforts after LSU found out it was going to the Sugar Bowl?
11. Did the new plan fit in with LSU's original marketing plan?
12. How can LSU use sports to gain national academic exposure?
13. Are sports the best outlet for LSU to get national coverage?
14. What are some of the mistakes made during the campaign?
15. What were the strengths and weakness of the campaign?
16. How was the campaign created?
17. Were similar campaigns studied?
18. Was any research done on similar campaigns launched by other universities?
19. What are the results of the campaign?

20. If LSU were to go to the national championship game again, would the Office of University Relations do anything differently? If so, what?
21. Did budget constraints affect the campaign? If so, how?
22. What advantages did having the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans offer the campaign? Were some things able to be accomplished that would not have been accomplished if the game were in Pasadena California? If so, what?
23. At what point was the Office of University Relations aware of the possibility of going to the national championship game? Were there plans to associate LSU sports with academics regardless of the bowl game LSU participated in?
24. What would have changed in the campaign if LSU had gone to a different bowl game?
25. How would LSU market itself nationally if the football team had not reached a bowl game?
26. What is the history of philanthropy at LSU? How is it related to the success or failure of the athletic program?
27. What are some of the negative aspects of LSU's image?
28. Can sports improve the academic image of the university?
29. Has LSU tried to link sports and academics prior to the Sugar Bowl appearance?
30. What is the athletic department's relationship with the rest of the university? What is the role of the athletic department when it comes to national coverage at LSU during home sporting events as far as information?
31. Is there communication between the Office of the Chancellor and the Office of University Relations when it comes to national sports coverage? Does UR suggest academically related stories about LSU to the athletic department in order to make ESPN, CBS, and ABC aware of what is going on academically so they can talk about it during the game?
32. If not, who gives the sports networks stories about the positive aspects of LSU sports/coaches, etc.
33. How has licensing of LSU products been affected by the national championship?

APPENDIX B: CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING SAMPLES



LSU A Great Game Plan

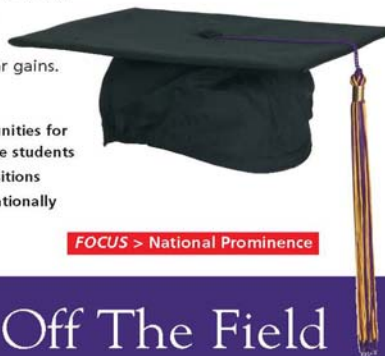


The LSU Tigers have developed and executed a great game plan and have become one of the top football programs in the country. Now they will compete for the national title, but they have won many other honors along the way.

- Southeastern Conference Champions 2001, 2003
- Four All-Americans: Skyler Green, Chad Lavalais, Stephen Peterman, and Corey Webster
- 2003 Associated Press National Coach of the Year Nick Saban

At the start of 2003, LSU launched its other winning game plan, the **National Flagship Agenda**. This seven-year strategy will elevate the University to a higher level of national prominence as one of the country's leading research institutions. And while the final whistle has yet to sound, the opening drive of this plan has already netted some spectacular gains.

- Expanding research opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students
- Adding 150 new faculty positions
- Increasing the number of nationally competitive programs



FOCUS > National Prominence

— On & Off The Field

VITA

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