



Abstract

The purpose of this project is to integrate marketing, public relations, and design thinking techniques in support of university experiential learning. The result will be an effective brand for The Cortex Center at Marshall University – a public organization seeking to connect academia with local public entities and businesses to address glaring needs in the Appalachian region. This project paves the way for future interdisciplinary collaboration between business, public relations, design, and computer science departments.

The study is divided into three major components: marketing research, content creation, and advertising initiatives. The marketing section of the study employs multiple surveys, personal interviews, and focus groups to understand the needs of Cortex's target markets. Based on these results, construction of creative content will include logo, website, and document design, along with a comprehensive branding guide. Finally, the two previous components will assimilate through original advertising materials to engage publics with the organization's presence.



Scholarly Rationale

The intent of this project is to create an effective brand for Cortex. Creative branding will enable recognition, and ultimately employment, of the organization beyond its current scope. Formed relatively recently, Cortex functions on a nationally unprecedented model that needs clear presentation and publicity to reach its full potential. My goal is to establish a clear identity for the organization and provide its leaders with the materials they need to successfully market their ideas. The elements I develop are meant to underpin the growth of Cortex – as creative publicity and clear branding will open doors for the organization's future initiatives.

Furthermore, this project paves the way for future interdisciplinary collaboration between the business, public relations, design, and computer science departments. Cortex itself hinges on the coupling of two political science and math professors – the project I propose lays the foundation for media and business students to support Cortex going forward. It pilots an innovative, interdisciplinary design project and establishes marketing research for subsequent projects. In addition, Cortex itself is blazing a trail for academia's involvement in community problems.



Focus Groups

Conducting a focus group provided greater insight into audience preferences concerning brand interaction and design elements. Eight students with majors spanning from sciences to the arts answered questions about the concepts they associate with experiential learning and community. They assessed color palettes, font choices, and shapes that may be used in Cortex's brand design.

The focus group was shown the current Cortex logo, graphic, and mission statement – all eight students agreed the current brand indicated that the organization was primarily concerned with scientific research projects, even though the organization is intended to provide experiential learning opportunities in a diverse range of fields.

Most participants agreed that the color palettes with a pop of color (numbers 1 and 4) seemed less boring and professional. They also noted that the fonts with serifs (Options One and Three) communicated a similar feeling. The group concluded that font Option Two was the most approachable and least "scientific" font of the options presented.

Future Work



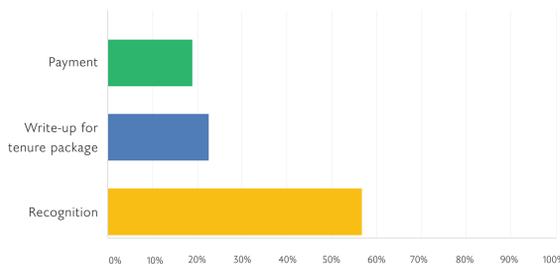
Based on the results of research used to empathize with students and faculty, I will construct a new brand for Cortex – decentralizing fonts, wording, and images that indicate the organization is primarily concerned with scientific endeavors. The brand will include a new logo, document design, branding guide, descriptive materials, and mission statement. The final piece of the brand will include an effective social media presence and public relations materials for Cortex's leaders to use in the future. At the conclusion of the design phase of this project, I will conduct another focus group to assess student and faculty response to Cortex's innovative brand.

Beyond the Gap

Interdisciplinary Design Thinking

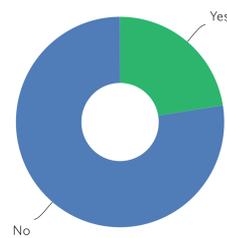
What incentives must be present for professors to work with students on projects or internships?

Answered: 26



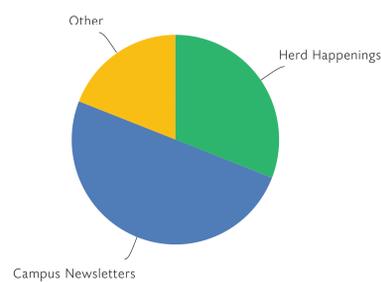
Students in the Honors College?

Answered: 147



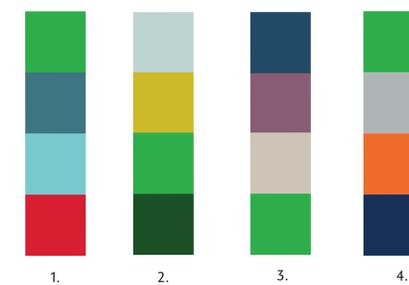
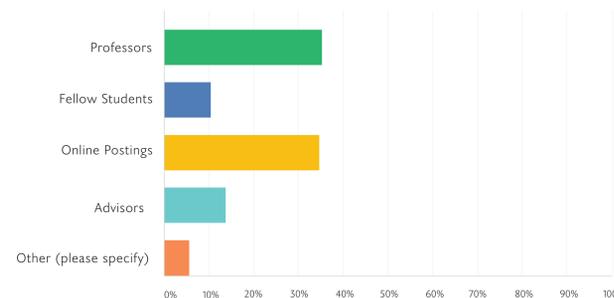
Where do professors learn about on-campus activities?

Answered: 42



Where do students learn about internship/research opportunities?

Answered: 147



Option 1: Century Old Style

Embrace the public good and strive to transform our community.

Option 2: Joanna Sans Nova

Embrace the public good and strive to transform our community.

Option 3: Perpetua

Embrace the public good and strive to transform our community.

Option 4: Franklin Gothic Medium

Embrace the public good and strive to transform our community.



Survey Research

Online surveys gained input from Cortex's three key markets: Marshall University students, Marshall University faculty, and local organizations' leadership. The student survey inquired about GPA, interest in research projects, and access to internships. The survey's results revealed the best means for targeted advertising for "high achieving students" (i.e. those who maintain a high grade-point average or participate in the honors college) and students less involved on campus. Notably, both segments expressed equal interest in unpaid internship and research experiences. Final survey results did not include the 26% of survey participants who responded they were in high school or graduate programs.

The faculty survey inquired about social media usage, information acquisition, incentive to oversee student projects, and previous interaction with experiential learning initiatives. Contrary to assumptions prior to conducting research, the survey's results exposed faculty's willingness to oversee experiential learning projects without financial compensation – many responded specifically that they view these opportunities as an inherent part of their job and passion.