

Sonoma State University

Strategic Enrollment Marketing Plan

2023-2027

Executive Summary

Sonoma State University (SSU) has developed this Strategic Enrollment Marketing Plan to support the objectives and strategies outlined in the University's Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan for 2023-2027. The marketing plan focuses on four key areas:

1. Developing a strong, compelling SSU brand, web site, and messaging
2. Enhancing digital marketing and lead generation including the creation of a library of digital assets for key departments and programs to personalize the recruitment experience for students
3. Expanding community outreach and partnerships throughout the region, key areas of California, WUE states, and by creating an international presence in the higher education market
4. Improving outreach and recruitment through enhanced lead generation, campus visit experiences, signature events, new student orientation, and conversion/yield activities
5. Streamlined admission and transfer credit processing removing barriers, using cutting edge technology, and curating a positive application experience for prospective students

Through integrated marketing and communications efforts across these focus areas, SSU aims to increase awareness and interest among prospective students, grow enrollment applications and yield, and cultivate a "culture of cultivation" to support student recruitment and retention. The plan leverages SSU's strengths as a public liberal arts university and seeks to diversify enrollment by expanding outreach across California and to other key markets.

1. SSU Brand Development

In collaboration with the University's Strategic Communications division (StratComm), Strategic Enrollment (SE) will work to build a unifying SSU brand that captures the university's unique identity is critical for effective marketing. SSU will work with a marketing consulting firm to develop a compelling brand platform and associated messaging.

Key aspects will include:

- Messaging that conveys SSU's strengths as a public liberal arts and sciences university
- Commitment to access and inclusion showcasing the opportunities for educational and personal growth
- Updated website focused on ease of use for prospective students and search engine optimization
- Engaging visual identity with consistent use of SSU logo, colors, fonts and imagery across channels
- Brand training and toolkits to engage the campus community as brand ambassadors
- Marketing campaigns launching the refreshed brand across paid, owned and earned media

In tandem with the brand initiative, StratComm will redesign its website to serve as an engaging, user-friendly "front door" for the university. This includes optimizing site architecture, content, calls-to-action and visual design to support outreach, recruitment and yield conversion activities.

2. Enhanced Digital Marketing

To expand outreach and engagement with prospective students, SSU will significantly enhance its digital marketing efforts through:

- Improved lead generation via name purchases, digital communications & advertising (including paid media), social media, and optimized web content and forms
- Automated and personalized prospect email nurturing leveraging a new CRM system
- Texting and virtual engagement opportunities integrated into key conversion points
- Digital ad retargeting to web visitors and event/inquiry leads
- Expanded social media presence on platforms frequented by prospective students
- Content marketing highlighting student stories, outcomes, alumni & career opportunities, and unique SSU programs/experiences

SSU will also capitalize on CSU system-wide marketing initiatives to complement campus efforts. Analytic capabilities will be developed and used to continually optimize performance of digital marketing and lead generation/conversion.

3. Community Outreach & Partnerships

Expanding outreach and building a robust enrollment pipeline requires cultivating strong partnerships with local, regional and out of area K-12 districts, community colleges, and non-profit organizations. SSU will diversify recruitment through:

- Enhanced outreach to top feeder high schools in Sonoma County and across California
- New guaranteed admission partnerships with K-12 districts and community colleges
- Targeted recruitment to major metro areas in CA and WUE states
- Bilingual outreach events and materials for Spanish-speaking students/families
- Dual Enrollment Partnerships with K-12 districts to provide college prep programming, supplement A-G courses, and enhance interaction with K-12 faculty and administrators
- Alumni and career networks mobilized to engage prospective students and connect them with career opportunities and internships

SSU will dedicate admissions staff to develop and manage these strategic partnerships and outreach initiatives. Signature events, visits and communication flows to nurture prospective students from these schools/regions.

4. Enhanced Campus Visit Experiences, Signature Events, and New Student Orientation

Experiencing SSU's beautiful campus and welcoming community first-hand is key to moving prospective students through the enrollment funnel. SSU will deliver exceptional campus visit experiences by:

- Showcasing unique campus facilities, student life and academic highlights via tours
- Providing signature events and for admitted students, K-12, community college partners, and non-profit organizations helping students become college ready
- Engaging faculty, staff, students and alumni (in-person, virtually, and digitally) to share their SSU experience with prospective students and their families
- Deploying an integrated visit promotion strategy via web, email, text, print and phone
- Launching a new virtual tour and interactive campus map on the SSU website
- Ensuring a seamless visit registration and follow-up process supported by the CRM

Returning to in-person orientation for new students in summer 2024 will enhance the onboarding experience for our new students and reduce summer melt. Creating a new in-person and virtual orientation program will begin in summer 2024 and be expanded in summer 2025.

Together, these initiatives will create a steady stream of visitors and nurture them to enroll. Post-visit communications will keep SSU top-of-mind and guide admitted students to confirm enrollment. New student orientation and associated yield conversion strategies will ensure that admitted students are successfully onboarded and enrolled at the university.

Conclusion

This marketing plan provides a roadmap to raise SSU's profile and grow enrollment over the next five years in alignment with SEM goals. By developing a strong brand, enhancing digital marketing, expanding outreach, reducing administrative barriers, and delivering excellent campus experiences, SSU will attract, engage and enroll an increasingly diverse student body.

The Marketing Action Plan serves as a companion document to the Enrollment Marketing Plan and will be updated each semester as initiatives are completed, implemented, and evaluated. As initiatives are implemented, this kind of regular monitoring and optimization will ensure marketing investments are generating results and ROI.