

On Brand:

STRENGTHENING YOUR MARKETING THROUGH AASCU'S NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

By Victoria Markovitz

Each state college and university (SCU) has unique traits it wants to share with key stakeholders, such as current and prospective students and the community. However, SCUs in general have core tenets that make them stand out from other higher education choices. By working together, SCUs can continue to tout their individual strengths while also widely promoting their common benefits.

AASCU, following member requests, launched the *Opportunities for All* (O4A) campaign in 2016 to bring heightened awareness to the value of SCUs in general, while providing leeway for individual SCUs to highlight their standout features. The campaign's intent is to complement and strengthen institutional messaging while allowing SCUs to amplify the reach of their marketing efforts by joining a national campaign. Together, SCUs can serve as force multipliers that extend messaging to student populations and other target audiences that could not be reached by one institution alone.

AASCU talked to senior communications professionals at four SCUs that are actively involved in the campaign—**California State University, Sacramento** (Sac State); **Framingham State University** (FSU, located in Massachusetts); **Mississippi University for Women** (The W); and the **State University of New York at Oswego** (SUNY Oswego)—to discuss how O4A helped them enhance their individual branding campaigns, and why they choose to include O4A in their marketing efforts.



KEY TRAITS OF SCUs

The O4A campaign is built around four core attributes that SCUs share: They are high quality, accessible, affordable and responsible.

As **high quality** institutions, SCUs have a student-centered focus, support different learning styles with a broad range of education opportunities, and are committed to increasing the number of baccalaureate degrees awarded to protect our country's future. SCUs are **accessible** by providing a viable higher education choice to a diverse cross-section of state residents, including serving non-traditional groups that are underrepresented in our communities. SCUs are also **affordable**; they offer a greater value for the money than other higher education options, reducing the likelihood of burdensome student debt. Finally, SCUs are **responsible**: They add value and contribute to the intellectual, cultural, economic and social advancement of their surrounding communities and regions.

The O4A campaign contains language that targets this messaging to key audiences for SCUs: prospective students and their families and high school counselors, SCU talent (i.e., faculty and staff), community leaders, the local electorate, and public officials. However, individual SCUs are typically already highlighting some or all of these qualities in their marketing campaigns. The key for each SCU is to pinpoint exactly what it wants to amplify and strengthen it by implementing O4A—using the campaign's messaging and tools to bring the conversation to the national level.

USE THE CAMPAIGN TO REINFORCE EXISTING MESSAGING

Institutions are finding that when their individual campaigns align with O4A, the national campaign is an opportunity to further elevate their messaging and to reach additional audiences.

The W's communications team has found O4A helps them showcase their first generation and nontraditional students and the benefits The W provides.

"The Opportunities for All campaign focuses on accessibility, affordability and quality education," said Anika Mitchell Perkins, the interim executive director of university relations at The W. "The campaign reinforces our messages to students and gives The W an opportunity to be more visible through a national campaign."

At Sac State, the Made at Sac State campaign promotes the accomplishments of prominent alumni to showcase how the university produces successful students who make a difference in the local community and throughout the nation. It also highlights how Sac State provides an accessible, high-quality and affordable education.


Phil Garcia, vice president for public affairs and advocacy at Sac State, who oversees government relations and formerly oversaw university-wide communications and marketing, recognized that the campaign dovetailed with O4A. This made O4A a great opportunity to further strengthen Sac State's campaign.

The Made at Sac State Blog
Updates from the award-winning Made at Sac State campaign

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Month: November 2017

Pair of Hornet alumni head California Department of Technology

 Jonathan Morales
November 29, 2017
Alumni, Community, Government, Made at Sac State, Public Policy
Amy Tong, Business Administration, Chris Cruz, Management Information Systems, MBA, State of California
1 Comment

If you think dealing with technology issues at home or at the office is a big job, imagine doing it for the entire state of California.

Running the state's Department of Technology – keeping computers and other technology up and running for more than 130 government agencies, as well as providing strategic guidance for California's IT programs and policy – are two Sacramento State alumni: Amy Tong '94 (Management Information Systems), MBA '98, and Chris Cruz '88 (Business Administration). [Tong is the department director](#) as well as the statewide chief information officer; [Cruz serves as chief deputy director and deputy state CIO](#).

 Amy Tong

Both grew up in Sacramento – Tong immigrated to the United States from China with her family when she was 12 – and came to Sac State in large part because it offered an affordable, quality education close to home. Both also have spent nearly their entire careers working in the public sector and say they enjoy their current roles because of the ability to take a wide view of the state's technology infrastructure and propose solutions to make it more efficient and effective.

Below, they answer a few questions about their time at Sac State and their current jobs with the Department of Technology.

This Made at Sac State alumni profile highlights how the school offers a "an affordable, quality education."

university is crucial.

"We're really focused on reaching underrepresented students, low-income students and minority students, and showing them the dream of a college education is possible due to SCUs like Framingham State," Magazu said. "We focus on our university, but want to talk to them about all SCUs. I think we're all stronger when we work together on these efforts."


When the governor of New York introduced the Excelsior Scholarship, which would provide tuition-free college at New York's public colleges and universities to families making up to \$100,000 this past fall, and eventually \$125,000 a year, SUNY Oswego saw this as a prime opportunity to stress the benefits of SUNY Oswego as an SCU.

"The Excelsior Scholarship aligned with SUNY Oswego's and AASCU's efforts to market access and opportunity for the next generation of students," said Wayne Westervelt, SUNY Oswego's chief communication officer. "By marketing and incentivizing full-time enrollment and college completion—both of which are proven game changers in students' success—and referencing AASCU's Opportunities for All campaign in the process, we were able to highlight the role SCUs play in delivering America's promise to our promising youth."

Student Life Spotlight

My Way to Belong

[Thalia Jimenez '18 >](#)
Major: Psychology, Minor: Neuroscience



"FSU offered me more financial aid than other schools, but then it became less about the money and more about the community. I'm president of the Psychology Club, an Orientation leader, and a member of the dance team and GenerationOne, a group that supports first-generation college students. I didn't realize how many different people from different backgrounds could get together and get things done – different incomes, different stories, but with the same interests and goals. I was a minority from a low-income family living in a wealthy town, so it was hard to fit in. Coming here there were people like me, and a lot of people who aren't like me, but who are just accepting. My goal is to help students be more engaged, join clubs and get out of their comfort zone."

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First generation student Thalia Jimenez highlighted how FSU was more affordable than other schools and had a welcoming and diverse community.

SHOWCASE STUDENTS AND ALUMNI

SCUs have also found O4A helps them showcase their students and alumni.

In 2016 and 2017, The W produced videos that featured first generation students, and shared these videos on its social media channels. The communications team used the main O4A hashtag—#Opps4All—in addition to the school campaign's hashtag—#TheBlueForYou—to extend what audiences saw the videos. The student videos ended up getting a higher reach than the university's average social media posts, with one particularly popular video garnering over 22,400 views.

“We have found that videos really work well. We're able to get footage of students in the classroom studying and engaging in activities that are a part of their studies,” Perkins said. “It's an opportunity to hear from our students and tell their stories in a compelling way—more than just using words.”

FSU has a group on campus called GenerationOne, which produces student profiles, videos, and Facebook and Twitter content for first generation students on campus. Students focus on what they enjoy most about college and the challenges they face, as well as why they chose FSU (e.g., its affordability, high quality of education). On its website, FSU has a “The FSU Difference” section that includes a GenerationOne profile. Under this profile, the school links to information about being an AACSU institution and its involvement with the O4A campaign.

“The Opps4All aspect of it plays really well into some of the themes we've always talked about: affordability, accessibility, and the power of education to really help people,” Magazu said.

The Made at Sac State campaign features alumni and the success they have found by attending Sac State. Their stories are timely and compelling, and showcase the strengths and priorities of the university. This helps drive pride and loyalty.

“Made at Sac State has been transformative in raising pride among alumni and current students,” Garcia said. “We serve first generation students, low-income students, students from traditionally underrepresented groups—we fit the profile of a campus that is the target of the O4A campaign.”

The Made at Sac State campaign is also being extended to include exceptional students and the faculty who are “making it happen” on campus right now.

The W used videos to showcase first generation students and used #Opps4All to bolster their reach.



Fostering an Informed Citizenry

President Stanley assumes a leadership role with national organization dedicated to public higher education



I believe in AACSU's mission and professional through our commitment to access and opportunity, public colleges and universities effectively and accountably deliver American dreams. AACSU is a first-of-its-kind organization with a research-based approach to providing guidance to higher education leaders across the country, looking carefully at current and emerging challenges, opportunities, as well as addressing certain challenges such as race, equity and excellence management.



What has been involved with American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AACSU) since you became college president in 1995. Why do you find it important to be involved with the organization, and what are some of the ways in which it is advancing higher education in the country?

It's significant importance is policy related to Pell grants, debt levels, accreditation and measurement of the Higher Education Act. Certainly, immigration policy and executive action have been important to our campus as we are being tighter to process and we are implementing policy through our efforts in Congress and in the federal courts.

Many state colleges and universities offer lower tuition costs for in-state residents, and some offer free tuition to in-state residents. Does AACSU support free public higher education for state residents?

Yes. The Public Good Commission studies and makes a report to the state legislature. It's a public good commission that's been set up to study the issue of public higher education. It's a public good commission that's been set up to study the issue of public higher education. It's a public good commission that's been set up to study the issue of public higher education.

SUNY Oswego's president, Deborah Stanley, discussed the benefits of AACSU and O4A in the school's alumni magazine.

GET CREATIVE

While many schools share O4A messaging on social media or on their websites, there are many ways to promote the value of SCUs.

In addition to featuring stories and videos on its website and sharing them on social media with the hashtags #MadeAtSacState and #MakingItHappenAtSacState, the Made at Sac State campaign profiles alumni on an electronic billboard that can be seen from a highway just south of the campus. The campaign also is promoted on T-shirts and other items, such as stickers and lapel pins.

“It's really resonated with people. More and more people say they are Made at Sac State, on campus and off, versus ‘I'm an alum,’” said Becky Repka, Sac State's director of marketing. “There is a real groundswell of enthusiasm.”

FSU highlights the O4A campaign and the value of SCUs during presidential commencements and addresses and in meetings with government officials.

SUNY Oswego incorporates SCU messaging in its press releases, interviews with media, speeches and remarks at campus events, student feature stories and magazine articles.

“When the O4A campaign aligns with what we are already doing to promote student success at SUNY Oswego, it's natural to incorporate—it's seamless to refer to and carry the marketing message of access and opportunity forward,” Westervelt said. “At SUNY Oswego, it strengthens our existing efforts to create and promote a culture of diversity and inclusion.”

No matter how an SCU chooses to integrate the O4A campaign into its messaging, the key is for the communications team to really think through what they want to elevate to a national level.

“The basic advice is to tell your story in your voice,” Garcia said. “The most effective messaging is authentic and genuine, and you know best how to tell your story.”

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