

2016 Strategic Plan Key Question Committee – Final Report

Question(s): Area 3 Distinctiveness; Question 6; Studying what other institutions are doing in their “positioning” and marketing efforts (particularly our peers and competitors), what can we do to raise our regional, state and national profile?

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Summary:

The higher education institutional environment has changed. The environment has become a mature industry, with excess supply, innovation developing slowly and with frugal stakeholders, who believe there is little difference in universities. In short, higher education has become a commodity where price becomes the means of competing. Universities that can identify strengths important to the stakeholders and communicate the strengths to stakeholders become distinctive and lessen the dependence on price as a strategy. The committee members reviewed the strategic plans of peers and competitors and were able to identify strengths of Indiana State University in comparison to peers and competitors.

Key Findings Summary

Key Finding 1	Strategic plans provide a glimpse into an institution’s priorities and future positioning
Key Finding 2	Similarity between institutions—all fighting for the same space force dependence on price competition
Key Finding 3	Areas of differences between Indiana State University and its peers/competitors—Undergraduate scholarship, distance learning, career-readiness
Key Finding 4	Institutions use media to communicate messaging and positioning; the media mix needed is changing with technological developments
Key Finding 5	The higher education institutional environment; a mature industry, slowing innovation, extensive product assortment, excess supply, increasingly frugal stakeholders and education becoming a “commodity” where strategy focuses on low price and cost containment
Key Finding 6	Universities that identify and position their strengths, when important to the target audience, depend less on low pricing to compete

Recommended Actions Summary

Recommended Action 1	Continue to emphasize and expand Community Service/Outreach/Engagement
Recommended Action 2	Bring greater visibility to student scholarship and creativity, especially at the undergraduate level
Recommended Action 3	Stress availability of faculty and opportunity for individualized attention
Recommended Action 4	Strengthen distance education and provide online faculty with appropriate training
Recommended Action 5	Promote ISU's commitment to career-readiness for its students
Recommended Action 6	Continue to improve the overall sustainability of the university
Recommended Action 7	Increase the use of online media in the positioning media mix

Background:

“Positioning—arranging for a market offering to occupy a clear, distinctive, and desirable place relative to competing products in the minds of the target consumers.”

“Positioning statement—a statement that summarizes company or brand positioning using the form: (target segment and need) our (brand) is (concept) that (point of difference).” Kotler and Armstrong, Principles of Marketing, 15 ed. P. 656

From the committee's search of available information, positioning is a relative recent inclusion in the strategic plans. The first efforts at positioning the university appear to be the “More from Day One” campaign that started +/- ten years ago. The current campaign, “More to Blue” emphasizes awareness rather than positioning.

Indiana State University is the pre-eminent public institution that integrates teaching and research for high-achieving, goal-oriented students who seek opportunities for personal, professional and intellectual growth in a diverse, civically engaged campus. From day one, our students are actively challenged by high-quality, unparalleled academic programs and are supported by personal attention from our dedicated faculty and staff who inspire students to create and apply knowledge through dynamic partnerships with the community and the world. Our graduates are valued for their demonstrated knowledge and expertise, active citizenship and leadership qualities. (Taken from “Background of ISU's first integrated marketing plan” provided by T. Exline)

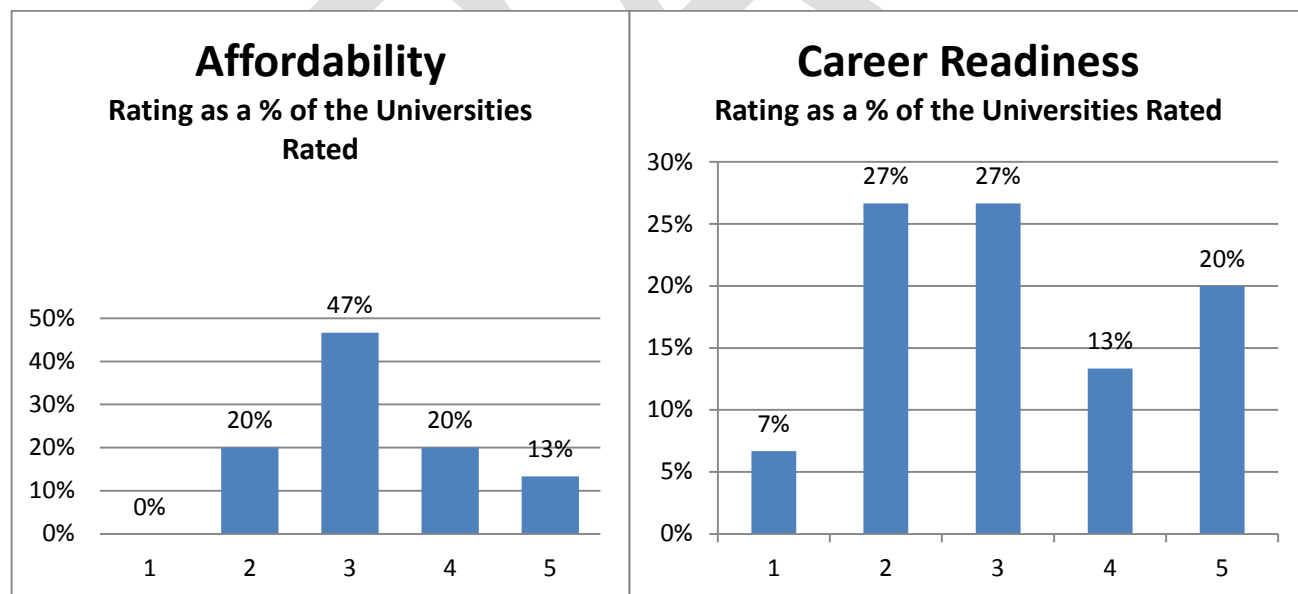
Analysis Methods:

- Identified peer/competitor Universities and developed a working list of institutions for review (utilized list currently used by ISU; added Indiana based institutions not on list; surveyed Carnegie database to determine institutions similar to ISU)
- Positioning occurs in the mind of the target group. ISU has several target groups; students, parents, faculty and staff, community members, individuals of influence, donors, employers and other stakeholders.

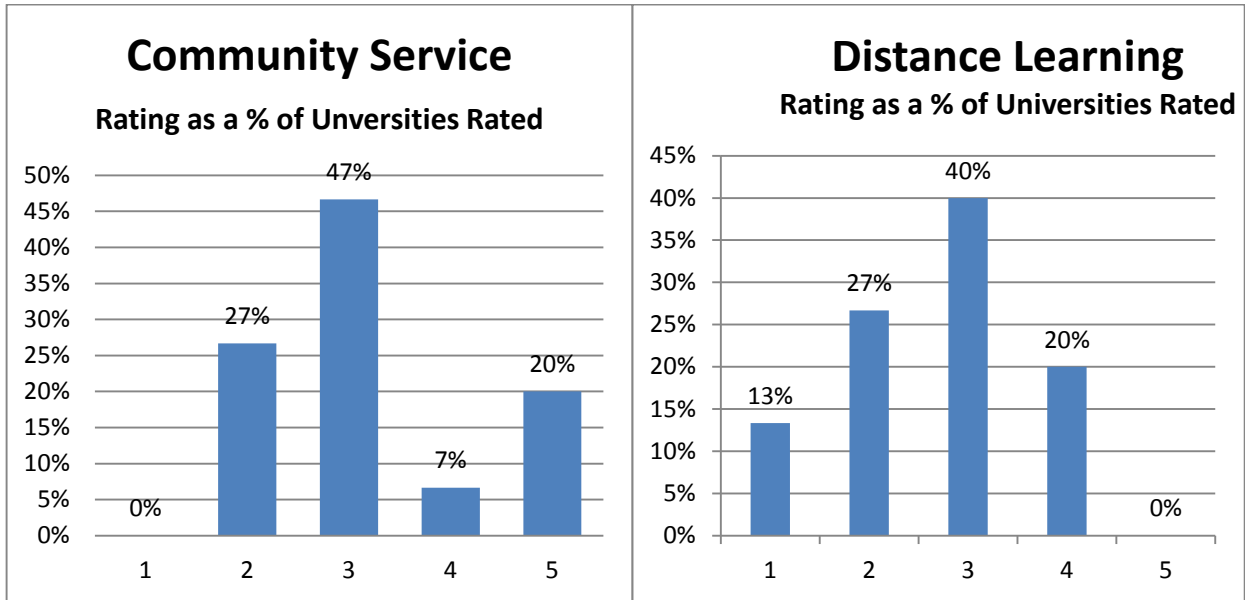
- Geographic research is also a consideration. Indiana State University should direct positioning efforts, in order of priority, on Wabash Valley, state, mid-west, national, and international.
- The committee members selected potential and current students as the primary focus of positioning efforts. The consensus of committee members was that success with students would have a position impact on all other target groups.
- Established a set of variables for positioning (Variables = Research, Experiential Learning, Student Scholarship, Community Scholarship, Community Service, Sustainability, Distance Learning, Faculty Accessibility, Career Readiness, Affordability; and Diversity)
- Committee members reviewed and scored assigned universities on the working list for the stress placed upon each variable
- Compiled and combined result data collected

A review of university and college websites uncovered positioning variables used by institutions of higher educations. Ten variables commonly appearing either as terms or as examples of activity at the universities were identified. The variables provided the base to gather data about selected peers and competitors. Graphs of the data follow. All graphs have the same format with the rating scale on the horizontal axis, with 5 equal to a high emphasis on the variable to position. The vertical scale is the percentage of universities and colleges, of those rated, with the rating. Indiana State University rating appears below the graph and not in the graph. The first positioning variable presented alphabetically is affordability.

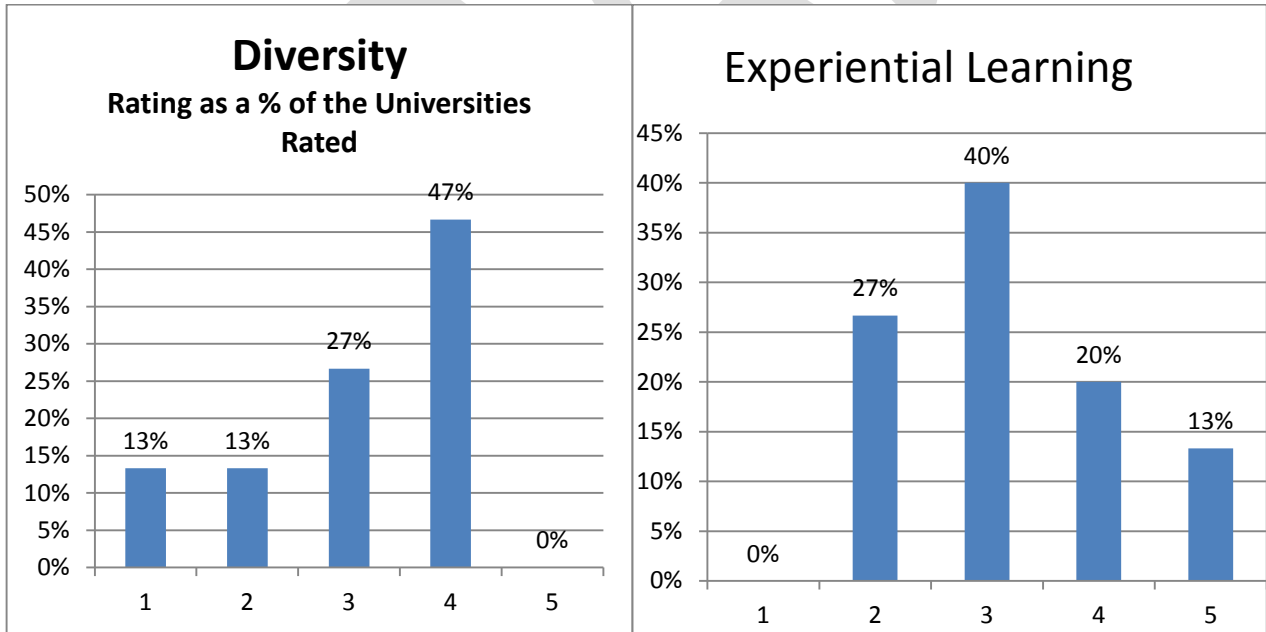
Graphs presented in alphabetical order.



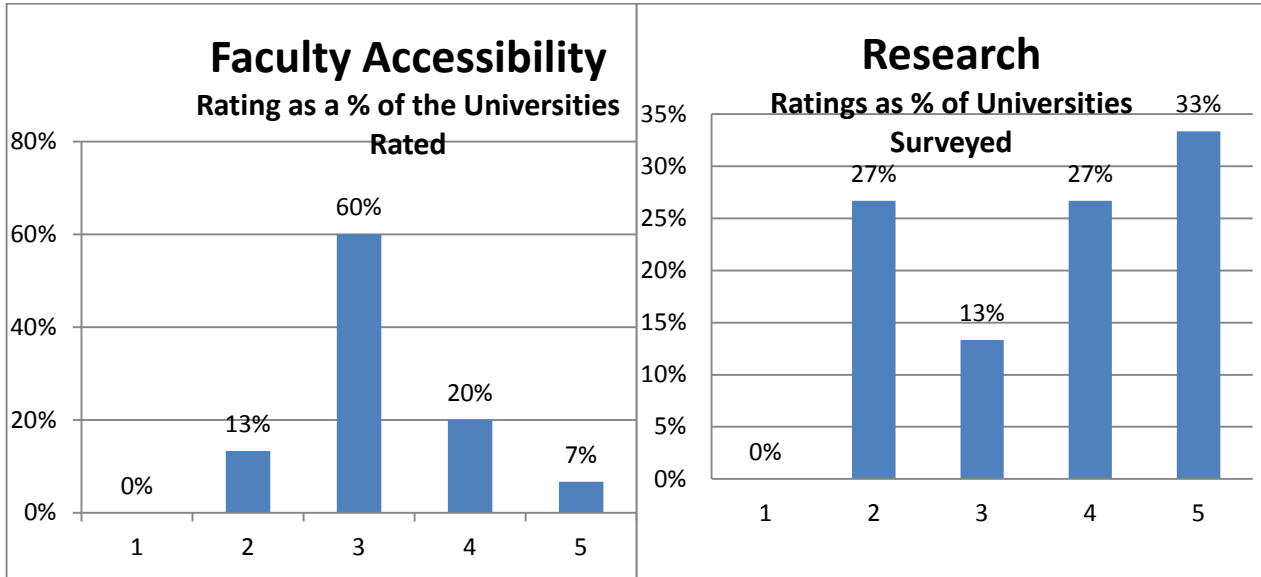
ISU Affordability Rating = 4; ISU Career Readiness Rating = 3, not included in the graphs. Rating of 5 = high emphasis as positioning variable.



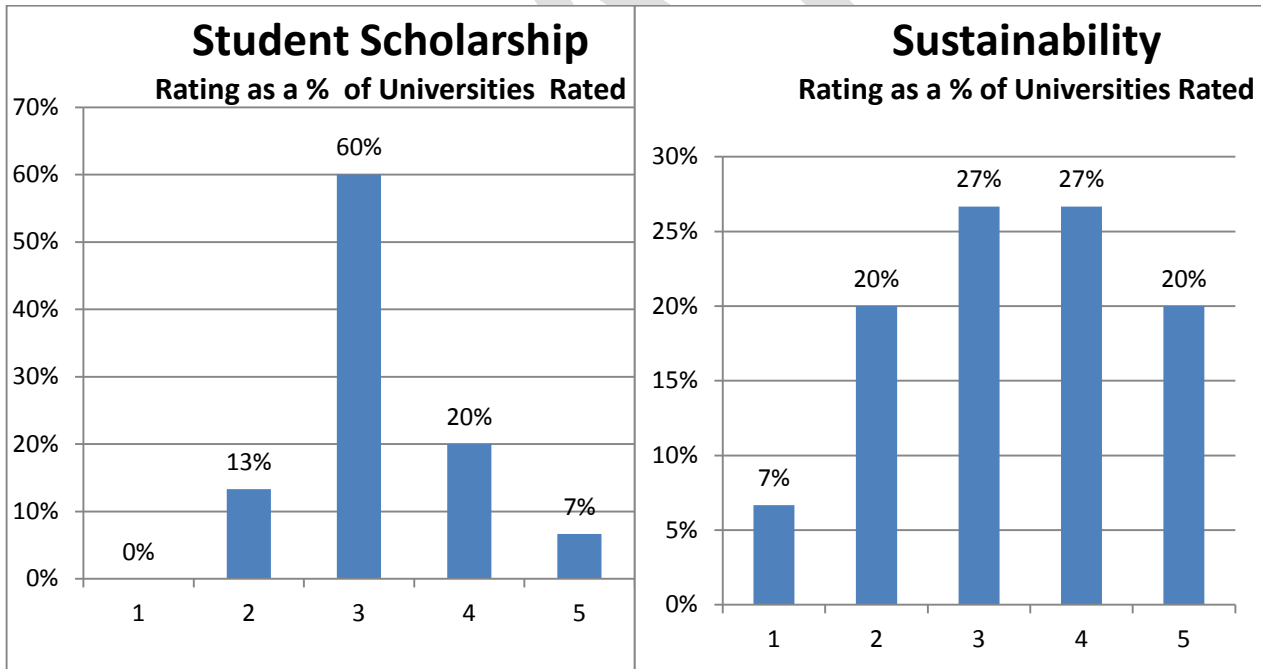
ISU Community Service Rating = 5, ISU Distance Learning Rating = 3 not included in the graphs. Rating of 5 = high emphasis as positioning variable.



ISU Diversity Rating = 4 ISU Experiential Learning Rating = 4,, not included in the graphs. Rating of 5 = high emphasis as positioning variable.



ISU Faculty Accessibility Rating = 3; ISU Research Rating = 2, not included in the graphs. Rating of 5 = high emphasis as positioning variable.



Student Scholarship Rating = 2; ISU Sustainability Rating = 2, not included in the graphs. Rating of 5 = high emphasis as positioning variable.

Summary Table

Positioning Characteristic	Percent of Universities at Rating of 1 or 2	Percent of Universities at Rating of 4 or 5	ISU's Rating
Affordability	20%	33%	4
Career Readiness	34%	33%	3
Community Service	27%	27%	5
Distance Learning	40%	20%	3
Diversity	26%	47%	4
Experiential Learning	27%	33%	4
Faculty Accessibility	13%	27%	3
Research	27%	60%	2
Student Scholarship	13%	27%	2
Sustainability	27%	47%	2

Discussed collected data and reached consensus

Key Findings:

After reviewing the strategic plans, websites, and other promotional materials of ISU and its peer institutions as they relate to marketing and positioning, the Committee found that:

Strategic plans provide a glimpse into an institution's priorities and future positioning: A university's strategic plan, attending documentation, and reports provide insight into the direction, values, and services provided to a variety of stakeholders by that university as expressed through the stated goals and benchmarks.

Similarity between institutions—all fighting for the same space: Institutions of higher education share common goals and provide similar services.

Areas of differences between institutions—Undergraduate scholarship, distance learning, career-readiness: Each university attempts to distinguish itself from its peers/competitors by capitalizing on strengths and areas, but cannot be all things to all people and must choose where to place its emphasis. This opens avenues of opportunities for competitors.

Institutions use media to communicate messaging and positioning: After establishing a course through strategic planning, universities utilize both traditional and digital marketing to position themselves in a positive manner emphasizing the goals identified in the strategic plan.

Recommended Actions:

After reviewing the strategic plans, websites, and other promotional materials of ISU and its peer institutions as they relate to marketing and positioning, the Committee recommends that ISU:

Continue to emphasize and expand Community Service/Outreach/Engagement: Recognized as a national leader in community engagement, ISU should continue its investment of resources to support

engagement activities; and to promote its accomplishments and commitment through both traditional and digital media.

Bring greater visibility to student scholarship and creativity, especially at the undergraduate level: The level of emphasis on undergraduate student scholarship and creativity differentiates ISU and its peer institutions from one another. This is an area beginning to receive more attention; and is an area where ISU could take a leadership position. The Center for Student Research and Creativity, the SURE and Honors Programs, etc. all provide a foundation upon which to build a promotional campaign that highlights student scholarship. The Center's current website appears to focus specifically on graduate work, which is not in fact true. The website would benefit from highlighting a Center program or activity that is solely the work of undergraduates. Stressing student scholarship will heighten the university's profile and will attract more students and support from alumni, employers, legislators, and other supporters of the University. The Library hosts Sycamore Scholars, the University's institutional repository (scholars.indstate.edu) that offers an online presence for student work. A stronger relationship between the Library, the Center, and the programs fostering student research would furnish a more cohesive approach to the support and recognition of these endeavors.

Stress availability of faculty and opportunity for individualized attention: The University has invested significant resources in student success. Faculty availability and individualized attention are key components of student success and need to be prominent in the messaging to prospective students and parents.

Strengthen distance education and provide online faculty with appropriate training: Developing online programs and classes is ubiquitous and online learning will continue to grow as an important option for acquiring a college education. ISU has made a commitment to extended learning in multiple environments. If ISU hopes to increase its market share of distance education students, the University will need to promote its online programs in a highly visible manner and accentuate, perhaps by using testimonials, the value of ISU over its competitors. Established resources such as the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence, Extended Learning personnel, and the Library's growing digitization program provide avenues of support for the design and development of a noteworthy online presence to separate ISU from its peers.

Promote ISU's commitment to career-readiness for its students: Career-readiness is a primary goal for students seeking academic or professional training. It is also a topic of great interest to employers and legislators as an indicator of the institution's ability to meet its mission of preparing students for careers. Perception of a university's ability to educate and graduate career-ready individuals can affect industry and state support. For this reason, it is important for ISU to portray the career-readiness of its students in a high profile and public manner.

Continue to improve the overall sustainability of the university: Sustainability as a promotional and positioning device demonstrates to stakeholders the university's commitment to economic and environmental health. Several of ISU's peers/competitors have made sustainability a major feature of their strategic plans. ISU can improve in this area by stressing its accomplishments through targeted promotional materials making the case of strong, good stewardship. Sustainability is the promise of a robust future.

Glossary of Variables (Alphabetical with no hierarchical order)

- **Affordability:** tuition and other expenses
- **Career Readiness:** academic and/or professional training + soft skills
- **Community Service:** collaboration between universities & communities for the mutual exchange of knowledge and resources to the benefit of all parties
- **Distance Learning:** online curriculum & degree programs
- **Diversity:** inclusiveness within the university community
- **Experiential Learning:** opportunities for direct experience with the learning environment and content
- **Faculty Accessibility:** availability of faculty to students
- **Research:** faculty and graduate student research
- **Student Scholarship:** undergraduate research
- **Sustainability:** university's economic and environmental health

ISU Peer/Competitor Institutions Reviewed

1. Bowling Green State University (Main campus) (BGS)
2. Cleveland State University (CSU)
3. East Tennessee State University (ETS)
4. Idaho State University (ISU Idaho)
5. Indiana University of Pennsylvania (Main campus) (IUP)
6. Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU)
7. South Dakota State University (SDSU)
8. Tennessee State University (TSU)
9. University of Missouri St. Louis (UMSL)
10. University of New Orleans (UNO)
11. University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG)
12. University of South Alabama (USA)
13. Ball State University (BSU)
14. IUPUI (IUPUI)
15. Eastern Illinois University (EIU)