
Articulating Your School's Value(s):

*Four Critical Steps to
Increasing Enrollment*



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What you'll learn in this eBook

- ▶ **Part 1: How to identify your school's core values.** A process to confirm that your school's desire and ability to deliver value is aligned with the current beliefs and behaviors that are represented in your school
- ▶ **Part 2: How to establish value for your school's offerings.** How to discover and establish the three types of value from two important perspectives for your school's offerings
- ▶ **Part 3: How to articulate both the values and value of your school.** How to articulate and categorize value statements for your school's academic programs and various offerings
- ▶ **Part 4: How to associate value statements with your prospect's key issues.** How to associate your school's value statements with your prospective student/constituent's key issues

Step 1

Identify your school's core values

Each year as you enter a new recruiting and enrollment season, one question should be paramount:

Why would a prospective student choose to attend my school?

There are likely several answers to that question and obviously there are many reasons why any particular student might select your school from a growing list of options. However, there seems to be a single factor motivating more students, and those influencing them, today than ever before.

That motivating factor is *value*.

More specifically: What value does your school offer to an incoming freshman, transfer or graduate school candidate?

Revisiting your core values

Vice Presidents and Directors of Enrollment often ask us, “How can we better communicate the value of attending and graduating from our school?” This is the key question we’ll address in this eBook.

In this section, we’ll begin by suggesting that it’s probably time for your school to revisit its core values. Why? Because in our experience, most schools’ core values do not include: “Deliver optimum value to our students and constituents.” And if a school’s core values do not somehow address the issue of student and constituent *value*, it will be difficult (if not impossible) for the school to deliver that value, and have the right to represent that they do.

In other words, your school’s ability to deliver value must begin at the level of the core value or mission statement. If it doesn’t live there, chances are your

school's leadership won't direct sufficient resources toward making it a reality. And if it isn't real, you shouldn't expect admissions or enrollment counselors to talk about it.

Interestingly, many schools' mission statements and foundational core values have not been reviewed for some time. For that reason, we'd like to suggest a methodology that your admissions and enrollment departments can use to review and confirm your school's core values – and even identify new ones if necessary.

How to identify your school's core values

1. **Gather the team.** Start by gathering a group of seven to 12 staff members. You need a combination of both new employees (who have been with your school less than a year) and more seasoned staff members (with more than three years at your school). Draw from all departments and experience levels. Agree to meet for two one-hour sessions with a break in between.
2. **Facilitate brainstorming.** Select a person with good facilitation skills to lead the group and, using a whiteboard, begin brainstorming, collaborating and documenting what individuals believe are and/or should be core values for your school. Remember, this is a brainstorming session so all contributions and comments are welcome and honored. Later when you are paring down your list there will be time for discussion and distillation of the items.
3. **Poll newer employees.** Start by asking your newer staff what made them want to work at (and attend, if they are alumni) your school. Ask what they experienced or saw at your school that they didn't see at others. Have them elaborate. Ask them what they've heard from others about your school.
4. **Poll seasoned employees.** Next, ask your seasoned staff why they are still at your school. Ask what excites them and gets them up in the morning ready to go to work. And lastly, solicit one or two cornerstone values they believe your school was founded and/or operates on.
5. **Invite group discussion.** Once everyone's contributions are on the whiteboard, begin discussing them among the group and distilling them

down if necessary.

6. **Rank the value statements.** When your list is finished, conclude the meeting, take a photo of the whiteboard and transfer the information to a spreadsheet. Share the spreadsheet with all group members and ask them to prioritize the list within each of the school's constituent groups: students, spouses, parents, alumni, faculty, staff, etc.
7. **Complete your values list.** The next step is to collect everyone's rankings, tally the data, reconvene the group and share the results. Now the paring and editing can begin. You'll want to whittle the list down to your top 10 essential, non-negotiable values that best represent your institution. This could take time — an additional meeting or two might be required — but the time you spend here is well worth it.

Why is all this necessary? Because your school's value messaging needs to reflect and align with your school's core values.

Further, your marketing and enrollment offices will be investing hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars to craft traditional and digital communication to attract "best fit" prospective students who are the financial lifeblood and sustaining force of your school.

These efforts are very strategic and need the support of your school's executives, so take the time to do it right.

Step 2

Establish value for your school's offerings

In the first section of this eBook, we presented a process your school can use to identify and align your core values with the current beliefs and behaviors in your school's culture. In this section, we'll look at how to discover and establish value for your school's offerings.

To begin with, we want to propose that there are *two perspectives* to consider when discovering and establishing value for your school:

- ▶ **OURS:** What are the distinctives (solutions) our school offers that we believe attract students and constituents?
- ▶ **THEIRS:** What do students and constituents want from the school they choose to attend?

Our distinctives/solutions

Let's consider *our* perspective first and follow a process to help discover our distinctives. The first step is to take your updated list of 10 core values you learned to create in the first section of this eBook. Compare that list to the top 10-20 distinctives that your admissions and marketing teams emphasize when representing your school.

Be sure to think about all the places these communications take place: college fairs, campus tours, personal interviews, emails, phone calls, printed materials, website, etc.

Next, from your comparison of these two lists, compile a third list of just the distinctives that accurately reflect your school's newly identified core values. This is your **OURS List**. This "living list" will serve as a good foundation for

creating your school's value(s) messaging. It can and should grow as you add new services, facilities, curriculum, programs and staff to your school's offerings.

Their needs/expectations

Now let's look at *their* perspective. What do students and constituents look for in a school? What do they expect in return for their emotional and financial investment? We recommend you start by looking at the most underserved or unserved issues of prospective students/constituents. We define a prospective student/constituent issue as a need, opportunity, challenge or desire.

For example, some *student* issues might include:

- ▶ A school with a highly respected nursing program or business school.
- ▶ A school with classroom and student housing facilities that are modern and equipped with state-of-the-art technologies.
- ▶ A school that is close to a metropolitan area with a diverse population.

On the other hand, some *parent/constituent* issues might include:

- ▶ A school that offers academic, athletic or merit scholarships.
- ▶ A school that offers part-time employment opportunities.
- ▶ A school known for its academic excellence and ability to position and place graduates into fulfilling and degree-specific jobs.

From this exercise, create a **THEIRS List** of the top 10-20 prospective/constituent issues just like you did with your distinctives (solutions).

Create your values list

Now, put your two lists side by side, matching THEIR issues with OUR solutions. This exercise answers the question:

How well does our school meet the top 10-20 issues that most motivate a student/constituent's school decision?

If this exercise reveals issues that your school doesn't address, then as a school you'll need to decide if you will commit resources to developing solutions that serve and fulfill them.

Now that you've discovered and established what your school's prioritized core values are, you're ready to learn how to assign and articulate them to prospective students/constituents. That's the subject of the next section.

Step 3

Articulate both the values and value of your school

So far in this eBook, we've discussed the importance of identifying and communicating your school's values. Now we'll move into the core of value(s)-based messaging. Why is it important to understand and be able to talk about your school's values? Because clearly articulating those values is proven to translate directly into increased enrollments, contributions and gifts.

In this section, we'll show you how to personalize your school's values, how to create value statements and how to articulate those statements to a prospective student or constituent.

Personalizing your school's values

Assigning and articulating the value of your school's offerings is incredibly important, but it can be the most subjective part of the value messaging process. It's subjective because each prospective student/constituent has his or her own way of emotionally evaluating your school. It can be a very personal thing, so you need to find ways to personalize those values.

Complicating this process somewhat is the fact that there are tangible/intangible and measurable/non-measurable forms of value that each school offers. So you need a context or model that makes it easy to articulate and assign both the values of your school and the value of its offerings.

What exactly are value statements?

Let's say you want to assess the tangible and measurable value of an individual graduating with a degree from your school's nursing program. And further, you want to assess the intangible and non-measurable value of a person pursuing a

fulfilling nursing career caring for and helping others live healthy and productive lives both in the U.S. and third-world countries.

The way to articulate these offerings is to create value statements. At VBI, we define a value statement as something that quantifies (if it's measurable) and personalizes your offering to a prospective student/constituent. A collection of value statements is a value proposition.

Finally, once you've collected your school's value statements, it's time to categorize them into the Value Matrix. The value matrix provides a way for you to categorize your school's offerings into one or more of the three value types (financial, experiential and/or image value) for one or both of two value perspectives (student and/or constituent).

Creating value statements: An example

Let's start by articulating and categorizing some value statements for a new nursing program at your school.

- ▶ **Value statement 1:** This year, we'll complete construction on a new, multi-million dollar science and nursing school building (Student and Constituent Experiential and Image Value).
- ▶ **Value statement 2:** The new facility is equipped with state-of-the-art medical equipment, labs and technology (Student Financial, Experiential and Image Value).
- ▶ **Value statement 3:** Ninety-five percent (95%) of last year's nursing students graduated in four years and received job offers from healthcare facilities within a 75-mile radius of our school.
- ▶ **Value statement 4:** Our school offers the only local RN-to-BSN program, including on-site coursework and community practicum experience.
- ▶ **Value statement 5:** Each year our school awards 3 nursing school scholarships to incoming freshman. The recipients receive 100%, 75% and 50% of their college expenses fully funded by the Murdock Foundation.

The key is to take each item of value and make it personal to the student/

constituent's needs by categorizing each value statement according to the type of Value it provides or delivers. This is done by asking if each value statement delivers one or more of the three value types (financial, experiential and/or image value) to one or both of the buyer's (student and/or constituent).

Once you've created and categorized each of your school's value statements into the value matrix categories, you have a knowledgebase from which admissions, marketing and development staffs can create messaging content, plans and strategies for their respective audiences.

Remember, providing value(s)-based messaging for your prospective student/constituent-facing staff is one of the best ways of increasing the probability of gaining an enrolled student, contribution or gift.

Step 4

Associate value statements with your prospect's key issues

We all know the importance of feeling valued. One way to express the value a person has to you and your institution is to personalize what that person sees, hears and experiences in response to what they ask or want to learn about your school. That's the subject of this section.

Represent what's relevant

This approach is different than our tendency to use our default “school pitches” or what “presents well” regardless of whether it relates and is relevant to the prospective student/constituent.

Personalizing your questions

In Section 3 we discussed personalizing your value statements. Personalizing begins with having something to personalize to. In other words, what is it that your prospective student/constituent needs to learn in order to assess whether your school is the best fit for them?

The association process begins with discovering the prospect's key issues by first personalizing our questions. This occurs when we ask the right questions in the right way. This is part of the qualification or discovery process.

Our objective is to pull out their dreams, desires, wants, challenges and opportunities (at VBI we call these *issues*). Knowing their key issues will direct you to the value statements that best match their issues and authentically represent your school.

How to ask the right questions in the right way is important and will be the subject of another eBook. For now let's get back to associating our school's value to our prospect's key issues.

Once you know what they want, you can begin associating what you can provide. In other words, once you've listened to what they've said (and maybe more important, what they've not said) you are ready to associate what your school can and will deliver.

This requires knowing which of your value statements, according to how they're categorized in the 6 Value Metric categories, is most important and relevant to your prospective student/constituent.

Associating value statements with key issues: An example

Let's look at an example. Let's say you're discussing your school's nursing program with a young woman who attended a local private high school and is graduating in the top 3% of her high school class. Her father is a small business owner whose company barely survived the 2008 recession. Her mother is a retired nurse who graduated from your school's nursing program.

Here are the key motivating issues you discovered for each of them:

- ▶ **Prospective student:** Complete nursing school in four years and get a job at a local hospital that allows their staff to participate in global outreaches to third-world countries providing medical treatment to those in need.
- ▶ **Mother:** For her daughter to attend and graduate from a quality nursing program in a safe community close to home.
- ▶ **Father:** For his daughter to graduate in four years and obtain sufficient financial aid allowing him to retire the debt he accumulated to keep his company in business.

Knowing these key motivating issues, what value statements would you select from your Value Matrix knowledgebase to effectively represent the value your school offers to each of them?

Looking back at Section 3, you would probably choose:

- ▶ **Prospective student:** Value statements 3 and 4.
- ▶ **Mother:** Value statements 1, 2 and 3.
- ▶ **Father:** Value statement 5.

We call this “representing what is relevant, not what’s in our repertoire.” It may be different than you’re now doing it but we believe if you take time to learn and integrate it into your enrollment process you’ll be pleased with the results.

Remaining authentic

One last critical thing (which ties back to Section 1):

Always present and represent the value(s) of your school that are obvious and observable through your school’s culture and community.

In this age of excessive marketing and selling, it’s critical that we remain real, authentic and natural in order to attract and enroll young adult and adult learners who are looking and yearning for it in their school choice.

The question is, can and will you offer it to them?

Conclusion: How do we know a value(s)-based approach works?

Over the last 20 years, VBI has trained thousands of professional sales people from pedigree companies like IBM, 3M and General Electric to adopt this value-based approach to representing their products/services.

Now universities and colleges throughout the U.S. and Canada are learning, integrating and benefiting from the same.

Ready to take your admissions team to the next level?

Reach and surpass your enrollment goals using a value(s)-based approach

Value Based Inc. (VBI) has developed the Value Based Enrollment Improvement Program for universities and colleges to train their Admissions team to increase their admission-to-enrollment rates. The program delivers Admissions best practices/processes that allow Admissions Counselors to relate and communicate in a natural and authentic way while improving their performance.

With Value Based, you can:

- ▶ Create and articulate value propositions for your school's degree programs and offerings
- ▶ Learn what value statements motivate each of the four buying styles
- ▶ Gain competence in executing the 30 Value(s)-Based consultative sales best practices
- ▶ Use value summarizations when reviewing financial aid packets with prospective students
- ▶ Qualify prospective students early and often to maximize "best fit" and minimize "melt"

"Since completing the program, we've experienced three consecutive record freshman classes."

Lindsay Knox
Director of Admissions,
George Fox University

Programs are customized to communicate your school's curriculum, community and culture. We offer onsite, online or blended training programs, plus ongoing reinforcement coaching and consulting.

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