



Quinsigamond Community College Branding Strategy

Campbell Soup, Volvo, Xerox, Coca-Cola... What could higher education possibly have in common with these commercial products and their companies? As objectionable as it may be to some within the walls of the academy, there are undeniable parallels. We serve diverse constituencies; the educational experience we provide to students has a price associated with it; institutional vitality is highly dependent upon the revenue generated from student enrollments; we have competitors; we compete on price, quality, service, and reputation; our image is largely determined by the constituents we serve; and their image of institutions like Quinsigamond Community College (QCC) is influenced by their interactions with the schools.

However, the concept of branding, as applied to higher education, is somewhat different than branding in the commercial sector. Most notably, branding in higher education is about who you are, not what a particular product offers to the marketplace. An educational brand is often equated to an institution's academic reputation. But, that explanation is far too limiting. Think of a college or university brand as being synonymous with the institution's personality—congruent with its mission, defined by its values.

Perhaps the most significant benefit of branding QCC is the focus it brings to the institution. For example, a college focused on changing student lives will respond to student needs and expectations but in an attempt to be all things to all people, often is vulnerable to mission drift or a gradual dilution of effectiveness as the institution becomes increasingly thin, first on the margins and then in the core enterprise—teaching and learning. The values-centric approach inherent in branding provides an institution with an anchor to guide responses to student needs and expectations. The brand is defined by where the institution's values and the students' expectations intersect. In this paradigm the brand becomes the filter through which everything is vetted (e.g., strategic directions, resource allocations, hiring decisions, and curriculum development). It serves as a lens to strategically focus the institution in the midst of fluid internal and external pressures as well as opportunities.

A values-based focus does not mean, however, that you can afford to ignore what your constituents expect from you. QCC will not thrive in a vacuum. Ultimately, the value of your brand is determined by those you serve. It is only worth what students and parents are willing to pay for it, donors are willing to give to support it, and faculty and staff are willing to contribute to make it real. The brand must have relevance to others.

Branding is a long-term investment of institutional resources and expertise. So, why should the college engage in such a labor-intensive and expense enterprise? QCC has an image that has evolved over many years. Changing that image will not happen overnight or without a higher level of effort than has existed heretofore. Branding is a

proven path to shifting an organization's image. An investment in such a demanding effort does have benefits that make the journey worthwhile. Such benefits include enhanced student and alumni loyalty, improved student satisfaction with the QCC experience, higher retention and graduation rates, a stronger competitive position, increased donations, and a clearly understood image. These are benefits that make an enduring difference in the life of an institution.

Current Status

Quinsigamond Community College has used the marketing slogan or tagline “Get There With Us,” but there is no evidence to suggest that this marketing message has been associated with a branding effort. The *brand* and the *marketing message* are not the same. Yet, they should be part of the same family—the *brand* is the parent of the *marketing message*. The marketing message is simply a mechanism for conveying the brand to various audiences.

In addition to lacking an affiliation with a brand, “Get There With Us” is flawed in other ways. Perhaps most profound is the absence of evidence in marketing materials to support the claim that QCC does indeed get students where they want to go. Student testimonials, alumni success stories, employer endorsements, admission rates to four-year universities, job placement rates, starting salaries, and third party affirmations of the quality of the QCC educational experience are but a view of the devices that can be deployed to achieve this objective.

As stated in the original consulting report, collateral materials lack emotional appeal and tend to focus on facts rather than benefits. The new Web site, while vastly improved in design and navigation, is still predominantly information- and transaction-based. It is not a marketing tool anchored in a strong brand.

The college needs a brand that reflects all the student populations it serves as well as your other constituent groups—family, alumni, donors, employers, etc. “Get There With Us” speaks only to the student audience and indirectly to their family. Contrary to what may be implied in the aforementioned statement, we are not suggesting you attempt to “be all things to all people.” We are, however, affirming that your brand must reflect the essence of Quinsigamond Community College in a way that is relevant to each of your key constituent groups. Rather than a scattershot approach, it must be presented with laser focused, pinpoint accuracy. While the articulation of the brand may vary somewhat to be relevant for each audience, the “drumbeat” must be the same.

The brand strategy presented in this report is the culmination of reviewing QCC data, conducting campus interviews, gleaning insights from a multi-audience image study, and examining the strengths and weaknesses of QCC’s primary competitors. With this information as contextual background, a close examination of the college’s mission and vision serves as an anchor to ground the proposed brand in the DNA of the institution. QCC’s mission states, “Quinsigamond Community College serves the diverse educational needs of Central Massachusetts by providing affordable, accessible, and high quality programming leading to transfer, career and lifelong learning.” As is the

nature of mission statements, this is not a marketing message or even particularly distinctive. It is, however, a platform from which an effective brand can be launched.

Throughout the remainder of this report, we provide a rationale for the proposed brand, a marketing message that supports and symbolizes the brand, a brand position, institutional attributes and values associated with the brand and message, student benefits aligned with the identified attributes and values, related communication strategies segmented by key student audiences, suggested promotional activities, as well as insights into how the educational product must align with the brand.

Brand Rationale

Undisputedly, Quinsigamond Community College is the leading provider of practical, real world education in Worcester and the surrounding area. No other local competitor provides more degrees and certificates that prepare students for direct entry into the workforce. Nor do they educate students with such an emphasis on hands-on application of knowledge learned.

Moreover, the competitor analysis suggests that QCC has a competitive advantage as being the best educational value in the Worcester area. Data collected through the QCC image study conducted by SEM WORKS indicates that many already view QCC as the low cost institution in the service region. Based on the image study findings, one can infer that current students integrate low cost perceptions with their positive experiences with faculty and the academic programs at QCC to derive meaning related to the value

of the QCC. However, the institution has not been successful in infecting prospective students with this same sense of value for a QCC education. While potential students are acutely aware of the lower tuition costs at QCC relative to other postsecondary options within commuting distance, they do not rate academic quality, quality of faculty, and academic reputation highly. Pure and simple, this is a marketing problem, not a product issue.

Quinsigamond Community College must leverage its pricing position and build on its natural educational strengths to shape a value proposition for those you serve. As identified in the “Promise” activity and confirmed by a prior Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey, the institution’s value proposition relates to the quality of education delivered at QCC, personalized support, and flexible learning options. The brand that most logically aligns with this market position and the institution’s mission, vision, and strategic directions is that of being:

the leader of practical education in the Worcester area.

Practical, in this context, has multiple meanings. First, it means useful in one’s life—personal or professional. It is an education that can be applied to something that matters to the student. Second, practical means that the pursuit of a degree, certificate, or course is manageable in the midst of a busy life. Flexible learning options allow the student to choose a path that works for his or her circumstance. Third, practical refers to how instruction and support are personalized to meet the student where he or she is

developmentally. In combination, these student benefits create a compelling value proposition.

After all, QCC is the place to come to find a better life, a broader array of choices, more chances for success, etc. The college is a lifeline for some and a springboard for others. It is a place to pursue and share knowledge but in the context of preparing the individual for something greater.

This innate need all humans have for something great in their lives is what makes the proposed QCC brand relevant. By tapping into this basic human desire, the college can motivate potential students and others to action. Connecting what the QCC experience represents with something that is relevant to people is critical to an effective brand strategy.

Marketing Message

The marketing message should reflect the essence of the brand (the leader of practical education in the Worcester area) in a way that captivates the target audience—leaving them with a longing to learn more. It also must be supported by evidence that adds credibility to the message and compels people to trust the messenger—in this case, Quinsigamond Community College. With this in mind, the recommended marketing message is:

Powering Dreams

This message is concise and compelling. Moreover, it is pliable enough to work with applications such as business cards and signage as well as speak to each of your primary constituent groups. When used consistently along with supporting evidence such as factoids, testimonials, third-party validation, and the like, the marketing message conveys a sentiment that is edgy and appealing to the masses. Everyone can find something relevant in this message. Students will see it as preparation for the next phase of their lives; alumni will reminisce over what the college did for them and take pride in what it is doing for others like them; donors will contribute to the potential of others (e.g., donations for scholarships) or invest in the economic fuel (a QCC education) for the region; and legislators will simply see the QCC message as good for the constituents they serve and the state.

Brand Position

Description: The *brand position* is the part of the brand identity and value proposition that is to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates an advantage over competing brands. It describes what the institution does and for whom. It also includes the unique value proposition, and promotes aspects of the institution that lend credibility.

Positioning Statements:

25 Word: Student Audience

Quinsigamond Community College is dedicated to **powering dreams** through learning that matters in the real world—learning designed especially for your lifestyle and your needs.

50 Word: General Audience

Quinsigamond Community College is the leader in practical education in the Worcester area. Dedicated to **powering dreams** through hands-on learning, flexible educational options, and personalized support, QCC is the place that empowers people to succeed. It is the place to pursue and share knowledge in the context of preparing students for something greater.

Brand Attributes and Values

The following is not intended to be an exhaustive listing of attributes and values associated with the brand but rather an illustrative sampling of possibilities. The QCC Marketing Team should engage in a more thorough review of attributes and values.

Examples of QCC brand attributes and values include:

- A caring faculty and staff
- A quality education
- A commitment to student success
- Personalized support
- Flexible learning options
- Convenient location and times
- Low cost

Brand Benefits

The attributes and values listed above have little meaning or relevance to a student without some translation to a benefit that is relevant to them personally. Relevance is defined by the recipient of the QCC experience, not the institution. Often relevance is unique to an individual and thus, the articulation of the message should be customized whenever possible. However, for purposes of illustration here as well as practical application at QCC, the examples that follow are described for a particular segment of the institution's market.

Table 1: Brand Benefits

Market Segment	Attribute/Value	Benefit
Returning adult student	A caring faculty and staff	Someone will always be there to help you with questions, academic concerns, and practical matters associated with your education
First generation student	A commitment to student success	Once QCC admits you, we are going to do whatever it takes to help you be successful; we are partners in your journey to achieving your dreams
Commuters and distance learners	Flexible learning options	You can conveniently get an QCC education from anywhere in the Worcester area as well as the world
Career-oriented students	Internships	You can get real world experience while enrolled in college
First-time Freshman	Low cost	You can save money by attending QCC and living at home

Communication Strategies

For the new brand to “grow legs” and become integrated into the fabric of QCC and associated externally with the college, you must engage in a massive internal and external marketing campaign. The internal campaign should be targeted at faculty, staff, and current students. Externally, the new brand must be conveyed to prospective students, the family of prospective students, guidance counselors, alumni, donors, employers, legislators, and the general public. The following are recommended rollout plans for the internal and external campaigns.

Table 2: Internal Campaign

Audience	Communication	Call to Action	Owner	Timeline	Effectiveness Measures
Faculty and staff	Unveiling of new brand message	Provide feedback	President	January, All College Day	Audience feedback
All academic and administrative units	Brief presentation and Q&A to describe the brand and related rollout as well as define the campus communities' role in promoting and living the brand	Embrace role in promoting and living the brand	VPs with assistance from the Marketing Team	Spring 2006	Audience feedback
All	Develop graphic images to support the brand	Consistent use of images that support the brand	Marketing Team	Fall 2005	Project completion
Faculty and staff	Prepare and disseminate a graphic standards manual with guidelines for appropriate use of the message, logo, and related images	Consistent use of new brand message, logo, and images	Marketing Team	January 2006	Project completion
President's Cabinet and deans	Meet with the President's Cabinet and deans to share the new graphic standards manual and seek their buy-in and support	Unwavering and visible support for the brand	Marketing Team	November 2005	Audience feedback
Faculty and staff	Meet with academic and administrative units along with their respective VP or dean to share the new graphic standards manual and emphasize the rationale and importance of campus-wide consistency	Unwavering and visible support for the brand	Marketing Team	Spring 2006	Audience feedback

Audience	Communication	Call to Action	Owner	Timeline	Effectiveness Measures
All	Incorporate new brand message into existing or new logo	Consistent use of new brand message and logo	Marketing Team	December 2005	Project completion
All	Create banners for ongoing campus use with the "Powering Dreams" message	NA	Marketing Team	Spring 2006	Project completion
All	Redesign campus signage to incorporate new message/logo	NA	TBD	Spring 2006	Project completion
Faculty and staff	Reprint business cards and stationery to reflect the new brand	Consistent use of new brand message and logo	Marketing Team	Spring 2006	Project completion
All	Redesign Web site using new message/logo	Consistent use of new brand message and logo	Web Master	Spring 2006	Project completion
All	Design internal printed materials using new message/logo	Consistent use of new brand message and logo	Marketing Team	Ongoing	Project completion
All	Use "Powering Dreams" on Bookstore merchandise	Consistent use of new brand message and logo	Bookstore Manager	Ongoing	Project completion
All	Involve the campus in identifying examples that support the brand	Submission of brand-related stories	Marketing Team	Ongoing	Audience participation
All	Involve the campus in discussion about what "Powering Dreams" means in the context of delivery of academic instruction and services	Define meaning of the brand for each unit	President's Cabinet and deans	Ongoing	Audience participation
All	Submit unit plans for operationalizing the brand	Operationalize the brand	President's Cabinet and deans	Ongoing	Plans submitted

Audience	Communication	Call to Action	Owner	Timeline	Effectiveness Measures
All	Link funding of budget requests to alignment with the brand	Funding requests support efforts to perpetuate and enhance the institution's brand	President's Cabinet and deans	Ongoing	Budget requests support the brand
All	Report progress on unit annual reports	Focus annual reports on brand-related efforts	President's Cabinet and deans	Ongoing	Annual reports submitted
All	Continue to improve upon branding efforts such as curriculum development, service delivery, and promotional activities	Infuse the brand into everything you do	President's Cabinet and deans	Ongoing	The brand becomes integrated into all aspects of the institution

Table 3: External Campaign

Audience	Communication	Call to Action	Delivery Method	Timeline	Effectiveness Measures
Prospective Students	Inquiry solicitation	Complete the inquiry response form	Search mailing, e-mail campaign, high school visits, Web and print ads	Spring 2006	Response rate
	Inquiry acknowledgement	Visit the campus	Automated e-mail response, phone contact, mail	Ongoing	Number of campus visitors
	Inquiry fulfillment	Visit the campus	Mailing packet of requested information	Ongoing	Number of campus visitors
	Inquiry cultivation	Apply for admission	Multiple mediums	Ongoing	Number of applications
	Inquiry conversion events	Apply for admission	Open houses, preview days, information sessions	Ongoing	Number of applications
	Application acknowledgement and request for missing credentials	Submit missing information	Mail, e-mail, portal, phone	Immediately following receipt of app and monthly thereafter	Number of completed applications
	Notification of admissions decision	Confirm intent to enroll	Mail	Within 48 hours of having a complete file	Number of enrollment deposits
	Admit cultivation	Confirm intent to enroll	Multiple mediums	Ongoing	Number of enrollment deposits and orientation reservations

Audience	Communication	Call to Action	Delivery Method	Timeline	Effectiveness Measures
Prospective Students	Admit conversion events	Register for classes	New student orientation	April–August for fall November–January for spring	Number of students with schedules
	Melt reduction	Become a part of the campus community	Multiple mediums	Post-orientation to the beginning of classes	Number of registered “no-shows”
Parents of Prospective Students	List creation (schools for their son or daughter to consider)	Have student inquire	Mail, phone, college nights, information sessions	Student’s sophomore/junior year	Number of inquiries
	Invitation to visit	Visit the campus	Mail, phone	Student’s junior/senior year	Number of campus visitors
	The final decision	Confirm intent to enroll	Phone, open houses, parent portal	Prior to May 1 st of the student’s senior year	Number of registrations
Guidance Counselors	Awareness campaign	Identify QCC with “Powering Dreams”	Branding campaign brochure, high school visits, counselor luncheons, counselor newsletter, counselor portal, promotional giveaways	Starting September 2006 and ongoing	Perceptions of QCC and student referrals

Audience	Communication	Call to Action	Delivery Method	Timeline	Effectiveness Measures
Alumni	Awareness campaign	Identify QCC with “Powering Dreams”	Branding campaign brochure, alumni magazine, local and campus events, letter from president of the Alumni Association, alumni portal, promotional giveaways	Starting with Alumni Weekend and ongoing	Perceptions of QCC, student referrals, and donations
Donors	Awareness campaign	Identify QCC with “Powering Dreams”	Local and campus events, branding campaign brochure, meetings with the president and development officers	Starting with launch of capital campaign, if not sooner	Perceptions of QCC and donations
Legislators	Awareness campaign	Identify QCC with “Powering Dreams”	Local and campus events, branding campaign brochure, meetings with the president and legislative staff	Starting with launch of capital campaign, if not sooner	Perceptions of QCC and donations
Employers	Awareness campaign	Identify QCC with “Powering Dreams”	See promotional activities	See promotional activities	Perceptions of QCC
General Public	Awareness campaign	Identify QCC with “Powering Dreams”	See promotional activities	See promotional activities	Perceptions of QCC

Promotional Activities

The primary purpose of this promotional plan is to help build awareness and reinforce your brand. A multichannel approach is recommended in order to reach the variety of audiences served by the institution. Furthermore, a sustained effort is necessary to create awareness. If budget constraints require you to choose between depth and breadth, elect to thoroughly penetrate your primary market—Worcester city limits and neighboring feeder areas.

Channels most prone to reach potential students include billboards, drive-time radio, high school newspapers, as well as broadcast television and cable stations such as MTV, VH1, and Fuse. More important than advertising in traditional mediums is ensuring the college appears prominently on popular search engines such as Yahoo! and Google.

Other non-student audiences will be exposed to the QCC brand most often via billboards, drive-time radio, and local newspapers. Also, seek exposure via local media for brand-related events (e.g., unveiling the new brand, a new logo, launch of a new Web site).

Table 4: Awareness Campaign

Audience	Promotional Activity	Call to Action	Delivery Method	Frequency	Effectiveness Measures
Students	Stories exemplifying QCC "Powering Dreams"	Visit the campus	Newspapers at feeder schools	Each issue of the school newspaper	Number of campus visitors
	Stories exemplifying QCC "Powering Dreams"	Visit the campus	Television	30+ spots per month per station	Number of campus visitors
	Teaser copy associated with an offer (e.g., win a "Powering Dreams" iPod and shirt)	Link to the QCC Web site	Web sites	Run in three-month cycles with a new offer each cycle	Number of click-throughs
All	Strong visual with "Powering Dreams" message	Visit poweringdreams.edu (which provides compelling selling points that support the brand and an inquiry form)	Billboards	A minimum of 10 billboards for no less than six months	Number of visitors and inquiries
	Stories exemplifying QCC "Powering Dreams"	Visit the campus	Drive-time radio	50+ spots per month per station	Number of campus visitors
	Stories exemplifying QCC "Powering Dreams"	Visit the campus	Local newspapers	1+ spots per week per paper (preferably the Sunday edition)	Number of campus visitors

The Product

To this point, everything described in this document has been related to the promotional side of the brand equation, which was the charge given to SEM WORKS. However, it must be noted that if the brand does not permeate all that the college does and is, “Powering Dreams” will be “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing” (William Shakespeare).

As mentioned in the initial consulting report, all service areas must deliver on the promise of the brand with every interaction they have with students. If an administrative office is perceived to be inhibiting a student’s dreams, the covenant between the student and the institution is broken and trust is eroded. To personify the brand, service areas must ensure they have high-performing, knowledgeable, courteous staff; intuitive, efficient processes; high tech and high touch student services; as well as a service philosophy that permeates every aspect of their work.

Equally importantly, faculty and the academic leadership must grapple with the meaning of “Powering Dreams” as it translates to the curriculum, delivery of instruction, and even academic advising. Within the next round of the Internal Program Review process, consider placing a greater emphasis on instructional effectiveness and flexible learning options. While the quality of QCC’s academic programs has been well established, it is always necessary for the educational arm of the institution to determine how effective it is in reaching the diversity of student learners you serve. If the college is promoting its ability to “Power Dreams,” it must do so for all of the constituents it serves.

Knowing that QCC's students have a preference for experimental, kinesthetic learning, the college may want to explore the degree to which faculty and the academic leadership desire to adopt pedagogy that aligns with these learning styles. Whatever the pedagogy, Qunisigamond must support faculty development and provide opportunities for faculty to engage in innovative approaches to ensure that students leave the institution having been "empowered" with a thirst for learning and the capacity to transform knowledge to action. By doing so, you will not only make the brand real, but you will "empower" students to *transfer to a four-year university, start a new career or pursue lifelong learning.*

Conclusion

Simply put, the purpose of institutional branding is to increase awareness and loyalty among the constituents you serve. With awareness and particularly loyalty come desirable by-products such as a more distinctive institutional image. The by-products of branding will propel QCC to greatness.

A roadmap for branding QCC is conveyed in this report. You must now have the courage to follow it. You must exert the institutional will necessary to use the branding lens for making decisions, letting go of the old way of viewing your world at QCC, sacrificing for the common good, and committing to stay the course. Use the branding initiative as a catalyst for systemic change, not just as a promotional technique. Leverage the brand to propel QCC to greatness.