



Integrated Marketing Communications Graduate Program Marketing Plan

**Ellie Mckenzie
Taylor Donato**

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Executive Summary

The IMC graduate program is a multiple-disciplinary approach to the proposed program synchronizing converging trends of traditional print, broadcast, web media, and marketing strategies with emerging technologies, such as blogs, websites, podcasts, and social media platforms. The well-rounded graduates the undergrad program currently produces urged the development of the graduate program where the program produces better-qualified students who could enter the job market at a higher level.

The program offers those already in the workforce to return to school and improve their skills, creating additional value for their employers. The proposed program allows graduate students to pursue the “development of enhanced skills in critical thinking, communication, leadership, and computer literacy,” as stated in the UWA mission. Growth at the local, state, and regional level mirror those at the national level, and are further validated by the 100% job-placement rate of students completing the existing UWA IMC undergraduate program.

The programs objectives include:

1. Demonstrate competency in planning, coordinating, executing, controlling, and measuring a communications message, to fulfill the definition of IMC, as stated by scholars Don Schultz, Stanley Tannenbaum, and Robert Lauterborn.
2. Appreciate and apply a convergent multimedia approach to coursework, class projects, and the completion of a thesis project.
3. Demonstrate a thorough compilation of multimedia skills, including writing, broadcasting, videography, photography, graphic design/layout, web design publishing, advertising, and public relations.
4. Demonstrate competency with multiple computer software programs to effectively produce multimedia messages.
5. Demonstrate competency in market analysis, market research, and the preparation of promotional strategies.

When creating the program, demand from graduates demonstrated the want for further development in their area of study. As a result of the program’s current popularity, the program is expanding internationally to appeal to French exchange students.

Situational Analysis

Customers:

Current customers include students from the University of West Alabama who graduated with a degree in IMC. A minority of the student base is also made up of students who graduated with other degrees such as Marketing and English. All with the desire to develop their skills beyond what the undergraduate programs had to offer.

The overall consensus from current students expresses satisfaction with the whole program. They find a year extremely appealing as the material is condensed, and the overall benefit of the program is worth the time. Although it is condensed and the content is more demanding, each student expressed that the in-depth approach to the projects enhanced their skills. As opposed to the undergraduate program, which only covers the basics. This set up allows the grad students to head projects and take control of teams to foster not only their IMC skills, but also their ability to lead groups; they expressed appreciation for this because they didn't have this in the undergrad program. They said this makes them more comfortable to enter a place of work as they have a broader skill set, they have had an extended chance to polish these skills and also develop interpersonal skills such as leadership that will translate to a workplace. The students added that the quality of lectures increased because the smaller classes meant that they could have one on one interaction with the professors who already had a good understanding of their current skills and areas for improvement. They are given more opportunities to use the skills on real-world clients, making them more comfortable to progress into the workplace.

Currently, the only aspects of the program that potentially discourages students from applying are the location and the fact that the program just three years old. Therefore it is not as established as competitors. Also, the university is located in a small rural town; some potential clients may view this as lacking in essential resources to pursue a graduate degree in IMC.

Due to the young nature of the program, analytics on past enrolment is weak, but they have reportedly seen an increase in online enquires and enrolment from outside institutions. Over 11% of current students come from out of state.

Situational Analysis Continued

Company (SWOT):

Strengths:

- Graduate students usually have access to graduate assistant positions on campus, which will help them provide for themselves.
- Tuition and costs of living are smaller in comparison to competitors.
- The curriculum is more hands-on and has both business and creative elements.
- Faculty offers a variety of skill sets, including business experience, videography, photography, advertising, graphic design, and more. Most faculty members have worked outside of the scope of academia and offer real job experience in these fields.
- There is a requirement of work experience outside. This is in the form of a 130-hour internship, separate from any roles the students currently participate in.
- There is a demand in the workforce for Integrated Marketing Communications experienced workers.
- The graduate program caters to those who did not receive their undergraduate degree in IMC by helping build their portfolios with multiple projects and professional development classes.
- Small class sizes allow personal interactions with professors
- An abundance of resources including two full classrooms of Mac computers that are loaded with all software needed, including the entire Adobe creative cloud and also video and camera equipment along with a full-size production studio.

Weaknesses:

- Livingston, Alabama, is a difficult location to sell to new targets. Most of the enrollment comes from students that completed their undergrad at UWA.
- The program is brand new in comparison to its established competitor programs.
- UWA is a smaller school and potentially could be seen as less credible versus larger institutions.

Opportunities:

- The growth potential for the program is regional, national, and world-wide because of the ability to reach exchange students.
- With six full-time faculty members, there is growth potential for the experienced of faculty in the program as more employees are added.
- To market for current professionals that are employed but want to expand their skill set by participating in this program.
- The surrounding area in Sumter County has a lot of potential for growth and expansion.

Threats:

- Competitors from larger universities that may be considered more prestigious such as the University of Alabama's public relations and advertising program and the Integrated Marketing Communications program at the University of Mississippi.

Situational Analysis Continued

- Combating the thought that potential students do not believe it is necessary to go to graduate school.
- Competing programs have a different curriculum that specializes and focus more on journalism, marketing, and business rather than the hands-on cumulative curriculum at UWA.
- Other competing universities that are continuing to evolve and become more hands-on like the IMC graduate program at UWA.

What does the program do and what do they hope to become?

The culture within the company pivots around the desire of all staff to foster the talents of individual students while highlighting areas for improvement. Instructors provide an environment that mirrors real-world working conditions by creating strict deadlines and high expectations. They aim to prepare students for the workplace by using their experience to motivate and push the students to strive for excellence. While grades are a focus, they attend to each student on a macro level to foster creativity and amplify their potential within the areas they excel in.

Students and staff work with real-world clients who provide class projects for the students. These include branding companies, creating and running websites, creating print, planning social media, photography, videography, and creating brochures and pamphlets. They interact with companies like professional agencies to provide to the company's needs alongside developing valuable real-world skills. They also develop an understanding of what 'industry-standard work' looks like and how it feels to work on a team under the constraints of a client. These include non-profits such as the Literacy Council of West Alabama and for-profit companies like Prystup.

Faculty prepare all students to work with technology by providing each student with access to state of the art technology through the use of Mac computers, Adobe software, DSLR cameras, recording equipment, sound tech, and video editing software. Once enrolled at UWA, each student receives a subscription to Microsoft Word and Grammarly. Students also have access to all staff members who can attend to any technical difficulties they may come across.

The IMC graduate program has an outstanding reputation as a program that not only places all of its graduates into jobs, but it creates a well-rounded individual who either excels or is competent within all areas of marketing and communications.

The goal of the IMC department is to graduate 100% of its students and place every one of them into a job. Alongside leaving the program better than they found it by learning skills to pass onto other students and transfer into the workplace.

Situational Analysis Continued

Context:

The current political environment has no impact on this product. The school is still an accredited institution, and degrees and masters obtained at the school are valid.

The current technological climate is strengthening the master's program as more and more companies are turning to digital marketing and communications, which is what this program specializes in. The program makes it imperative that students are competent when using technology, so they are ready for a commercial environment that is dominated by technological advances. Professors stress the importance of staying up to date with the technological climate to remain an asset to the company they work within.

Social trends also indicate that the program has the potential to flourish and grow. This is due to the demand from businesses for people to learn these skills before they enter the workplace. Companies are suggesting one or more years of experience, and the graduate program offers this valuable and essential real-world experience for students to put on their resumes to strengthen their applications.

Prospects can apply online, which means that technology is also enhancing the application process. It provides applicants with access to information; they can email to receive more information, visit the website, and also receive e-marketing emails containing pamphlets about the program. They have further access to what the program is and how they can apply. Therefore, technology could amplify the demand for this major as it is becoming an essential part of all work environments and the technology is also allowing people to apply quickly and easily.

Collaborators:

The program collaborates with outside resources such as printing companies, clients, and software agencies who all contribute to the program's quality service of providing the students with hands-on experience. The program needs these companies to provide them with the software and services to create the student's designs and material and also publish them if necessary. For example, when the zone magazine was published, a printing company which the department had a good relationship with was happy to provide the printing of the magazine.

Collaborators who connect directly with the classes and professors are the clients for which they create content for. This includes organizations like the Literacy Council of West Alabama, Prystup, Demopolis Chamber of Commerce, and Temporary Emergency Services of West Alabama. The program maintains a healthy and positive relationship with these collaborators because they provide students with valuable real-world experiences alongside giving the companies consent to strengthen their brand.



Situational Analysis Continued

The University marketing department also collaborates with the program to provide application information and prices online. They are a vital component in providing prospects with the information they need when searching for information online through the university's website.

The relation between the two is mutually beneficial because through having the program on their website, they provide the opportunity for people to pay to attend the university, generating funds for the institution and the IMC post-graduate program.

Competitors:

Current competitors in the proximity of UWA who offer similar programs in communications and marketing include Alabama, Ole Miss, Southern Mississippi, Alabama A&M University, Auburn University, Troy University, and South Alabama.

Some of these programs offer a more in-depth approach to sections of the program, such as communications, journalism, and marketing. For example, they focus on the writing aspect and therefore develop better skills in the journalistic section of the field. Other schools produce students more skilled and knowledgeable in specific areas.

However, none of the current competitors offer the same curriculum from knowledgeable professors with real-world work examples. The UWA IMC graduate program provides a comprehensive understanding of the whole profession. It allows the students to further their knowledge in the areas they enjoy and choose to excel in. This makes them more employable as their skill base is comprehensive and relatable. As one student wrote on the closed IMC Facebook group, "My job isn't really IMC-ish—but they told me I got the job from my portfolio."

Future projection for growth in competition looks likely due to the current technological climate. Studies show that companies are demanding employees with skills in IMC due to the nature of modern marketing. The lay out of a comprehensive program looks likely to be adopted by other programs because it makes the graduates more attractive to an employer. However, growth in competition may not affect the program due to the fact that UWA will be more established than others. They will have had longer to adapt the program through trial and error to create a program the consumer/ students want.

Strategic Development

Segmentation:

In conclusion to our market research, our current customer base is comprised of students receiving a degree from the university. The majority of them are IMC students looking to enhance their skills further and practice their talents under my specific guidance. A smaller minority of the customer base is comprised of students at the university who pursued a degree in a different field such as English or Marketing. These individuals look to gain a better understanding of the design element of their major. They bring in specific skills from their current major and seek a master in IMC because they believe it makes them more employable. They expressed an understanding that the current climate is heading in a digital direction, and they wanted to complement their degree and existing skills with skills that would help them excel in any work environment. They showed an interest in the public relations aspect of the program, the design work, and also the professional approach to the class projects and their involvement with real-world clients.

11% of the clients are from different states, but they completed their degree at UWA. The majority of our clients are people who have been fostered through the university and are familiar with the area, school, and professors. The online students are comprised of several different people from different locations. They span between the ages range of 21 to 25, except for a few mature students.

The current customers displayed a high regard for the program and were extremely happy with the professional format and the quality of education they are receiving. Some clients did say that they felt the quality and personal feel of the program might be compromised if the program became more popular and class sizes increased. Therefore this would be something we would need to consider for future expansion.

Current customers actively seek out the program because they wish to further their studies, and they already know and trust the standard and quality that the program delivers. They want to get a masters because they see it as an opportunity to put themselves above other applicants when applying for a job. One student said that they believed the program would make a difference in their chance for a higher income from their first job.

One current mature student said she returned to education and to pursue a masters in IMC because she found herself doing work related to design and public relations but felt she didn't have the skills to do her job adequately. She praised the program for how flexible it was as she continued her career alongside her studies, and she used her current employment to provide case studies and projects in class.

Current customers who come from other majors and institutions, slack the experience and classwork already completed by the undergraduates.

Strategic Development Continued

Components such as a digital portfolio and key skills that students picked up on during their four years as an undergrad are hard to make up for within the duration of the one-year master program. This is something that will need addressing and considering as student enrolment begins to increase and attracts students from further afield.

Nonusers include people who have not completed an undergraduate degree of any kind. Likewise, the program will not appeal to those who have no desire to complete a masters in IMC. This would include people who want to pursue a career in other areas such as nursing, music, or physical education. This is due to the fact this masters program wouldn't enhance their skills in their chosen field, and it would have no benefit to their employability. Other nonusers would include people already graduating with a master's degree in a different field and, therefore, would not require our services.

Ideal customers would be anyone with a genuine interest in the subject. Therefore, an increased number of IMC undergraduate students choosing to develop their skills furthermore students from other programs looking to broaden their skills would be a perfect fit. We also will seek marketing opportunities for more mature students who are currently employed in the workforce and understand that IMC will set them apart from other employees.

Outside of the current clients that we would consider as ideal, we also want to branch out to students from other schools. The lack of maturity of the program means it is missing out on reaching students from other schools all over the US. The program has the resources to compete with any program but lacks the means of reaching more distant clients. For example, students who complete a degree in marketing, communications, or English from other institutions may find the program extremely beneficial. Therefore, there needs to be a means of reaching them to advertise the master program.

The program is also looking to bring some of its french exchange students through to the masters program. The university is already linked with foreign exchange students, and the majority of the positive feedback has come from French students expressing their gratitude from the program. The small duration of their exchange means they too, are at a disadvantage to those who have fostered their skills over four years. The master program is a perfect fit for them because it allows them to continue their studies for another year in a condensed format. The skills required are also slightly more advanced, so within the time frame, they will have the opportunity to practice their skills in their chosen area.

Overall, ideal customers would be anyone with a genuine desire to study IMC. The program fairs well for those with a love of the content and a passion for pursuing a career within any realm of marketing or communications.

Strategic Development Continued

Targeting:

The total number of undergraduate students has quadrupled, and therefore if we are to estimate the growth of the program through the numbers, our current target of UWA IMC undergrads would be profitable enough to continue the program. With the addition of the desired target market, the profitability of these groups is ensured. The current undergraduate students progressing to the masters program bring a commitment to the program and, therefore, are more likely to return to the masters program at UWA as opposed to another institution. Therefore, current undergrads are the primary target.

Likewise, French exchange students who get a taste of the undergraduate program for a year will be easily targeted because they also have a sense of commitment to the school, professors, and IMC in a way compete outsiders wouldn't have. They are given a taste of the program and the school during their exchange and are more likely to return for little investment to marketing to them.

Both of these groups can be targeted at a low cost to the institution because they can be reached through word of mouth. They are already paying for a product provided by IMC and are therefore considered as return customers. This can be monitored through the number of students returning from the undergrad program by simply counting return students. Similar to the current French exchange students, this can be monitored through counting returners. When targeting new French exchange students, we will reach out to the french college programs we already have established relationships with, as well as to try and build more connections. The current connections to french exchange programs are IGR/IAE Rennes, EM Normandie, IAE Bordeaux and all of these are targeted strictly through international programs.

The characteristics of the targeted market include a passion and desire to learn the skills needed to excel in IMC. Specific love for a segment of the program is not required; however, if students do have a single passion, this can be highlighted and catered to.

We would target other students from other majors in the school by word of mouth and also the use of flyers and leaflets. This can be handed out on campus to advisors to show students the opportunities IMC can have for an undergrad looking to further their talents. Some students in other majors may not be aware of what the program has to offer and would benefit from having direct information on hand from an employee of the university. This is a relatively cheap and easy way to reach this desired market. Organic word of mouth from an advisor can lead to a meeting with Dr. Jones to receive more information on the program and conduct a tour of the facilities. Again, this is of no extra monetary cost, just the time it would take to interact with the prospect.

We would target students from other schools by continuing to market our programs regionally by the use of printed and online advertising.

Strategic Development Continued

Positioning:

The IMC graduate program seeks a strategic market position as a professional, well-rounded program despite its lack of maturity as a program for higher education.

We are low cost compared to competitors but produce a high-quality product. Students receive an exceptionally high-quality product in comparison to its price and the price other institutions charge for a low quality and less comprehensive product. We can't reach a mass market because of resources, and it's not necessary or beneficial to the program. They can target local schools and undergraduate students because this market would be fruitful enough to provide a healthy profit but also ensure class sizes won't exceed full capacity. This would potentially jeopardize the quality of the education being delivered.

The Marketing Mix

Product:

The product that is being offered is a Master of Arts in Integrated Marketing Communications. To complete the master's program, each student must complete 3 hours in the following classes; exploration of mass media, IMC thesis project, and complete a professional media internship. They must also complete 12 hours of communication electives and nine hours of marketing/ management electives. This accumulates a total of 30 credit hours.

Alongside classes, the product also provides students the chance to work with real-world companies through involvement with their ad agency. They have access to industry-standard software, including Adobe Creative Cloud and Google Analytics, with the option to obtain certifications in social media scheduling and analytics, graphic design, and web design.

Another exclusive component of the product includes submission to regional and national conferences and competitions. This is where the students are allowed to submit their work to be judged. They have the chance to win accolades and affirmation of their skills. Through attending, they develop an understanding of other programs, meet people currently in the industry, and also see what work other peers are producing within the field of IMC.

One valuable aspect which students pay for is faculty with years of diverse industry experience how are available to help, regardless of whether they are in their class. They provide realistic feedback from their experiences working for companies or being self-employed. This is a priceless aspect of the program which reiterates the quality of the product that the customers are paying for.

Each student graduates with a comprehensive digital and print multimedia portfolio with a packed resume to show employers in interviews. In order to create this, they need a webmaster to host these sites and ensure they continue to be accessible after graduation.

These sides contain a portfolio of work created within the duration of the graduate program (and undergraduate program, if applicable).

There is also an opportunity to join the IMC honors society and be involved in immersion trips. These are planned and carried out by the program, and the trips are free of a direct charge because they are funded for by the program. The trips provide a chance to talk with people within the industry and Alumni who graduated from the program, providing an insight into life after graduation.

The Marketing Mix Continued

Price:

The application fee for the program is \$30. The price per in-class credit hour is \$429. Completion of the program requires a total of 30 credit hours. This is split into three semesters starting in the Summer with six credits, continuing to the Fall and Spring, where the remaining 24 credits are divided. The total cost of the program is \$12,870. Upon graduation, there is a fee of \$75.

Place:

The product can be accessed on the UWA campus located in Livingston, Alabama, or online allowing the degree to be completed globally. The curriculum is also accessible online to a global market.

It is currently advertised locally at the university through its website and word of mouth through current undergraduates.

Promotion:

Current promotion includes word of mouth through faculties when students express an interest in the program. This extends to tours where information is given directly from faculty.

The university also advertises the program online through their website. This information can be forwarded to anyone who expresses an interest in the program. They can also use the website to contact IMC staff directly and the program can be further promoted this way. Planned promotions include leaflets which can be distributed both physically and electronically to national or world wide potential customers. This would display an overview of the course and where they can find more information before applying.

We also plan to create a social media for the program where students can post work and interact with people who want to practice IMC. since the program has a heavy focus on digital media, social media would be appropriate as a showcase of the work they produce and the skills they learn.