

# IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY ADVENTURE CAMPAIGN **COMMUNICATION GUIDE**

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## INTRODUCTION

Great, you're thinking. Another set of mandates you have to shoehorn into what you're writing. As if creating the endless communications you're responsible for isn't hard enough.

Or – great, you're thinking. A pre-written template you can plug a couple sentences into and be done with it. Creating the endless communications you're responsible for isn't hard at all.

Whether you take this as good news or bad, this communication guide takes neither of these approaches. It isn't a set of restrictions and mandates, nor a cookie-cutter template.

This guide is designed to help you write more powerful communications, capturing what makes Iowa State University special to your various audiences, what makes us stand out from other universities. By reading this guide, you'll gain an understanding of how the brand promise relates to what you're writing, as well as identifying strategies on how to connect to your audience.

In that sense, this guide will make writing your communications easier. But in the end, it is still you, the writer, who will connect with your audience. You know what you want to say to them. This guide helps show you how to say it. Simply. Powerfully. With purpose.

## BRAND PROMISE

Deep down, everyone who has lived or worked here knows that Iowa State is a special place. We intuitively feel that there is not another campus – or another time in your life – quite like what you experience here. Yet how can one put that feeling down in words?

Well, throughout the years we've talked to the experts: prospective students. Through extensive focus group research (we are a research institution after all), we asked prospective students what their ideal university would be. Most recently, we discovered the hallmarks of today's students include:

- Success driven
- Desire to make an impact
- Value diversity and creativity
- Challenge convention
- Individuality

Once we identified what students were looking for from a college, we knew how to position what Iowa State has to offer in a statement called a unique brand advantage:

"Iowa State University offers a transformative student experience rich in new ideas, diverse perspectives, and imaginative people so that students can be inspired to think differently and create change."

But what do we mean by transformative? Simply put, students want access to opportunities that change them into who they're meant to be in all facets of their life – socially, academically, and personally.

## BRAND VOICE

Think about how you talk differently to your mother than you do to a coworker than you do to your best friend. You use a different “voice” depending on your audience. The same holds true with brand communications – you want to communicate the brand promise in a voice that connects with your audience. This is the brand voice that’s unique to Iowa State University.

The key is to think about whom your communication is targeting. You speak differently to a prospective student who’s leaving home for the first time than you speak to a senior who’s preparing to begin a career.

That’s true for both what you say and how you say it. Toward the back of this communication guide, you’ll find some insights about various audiences.

Another difference is that Iowa State is uniquely focused on our students and their adventures here. So as often as possible, use “you” statements in headlines and copy. The following examples illustrate this point:

Use reassuring language.

- Do: This is your adventure. Make the most of it.
- Don’t: We’re here to help you make the most of your adventure.

Be inspiring, engaging, and aspirational.

- Do: The world is your adventure. Go get it.
- Don’t: Start with us on your adventure.

## HALLMARKS OF PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS TODAY

**Success Driven**– I want to stand out, be recognized and valued

**Desire to Make an Impact**– I want to impact my community and broader society in a meaningful way

**Value Diversity & Creativity**– I want diversity of thinking, people, influences, and ideas to help me grow

**Challenge Convention**– I value the importance of what could be, versus what was

**Individuality**– I want to be distinct, unique, and uncommon

# SUPPORT FOR THE BRAND PROMISE

The brand promise is designed to align what students want from their ideal college with the unique experience Iowa State offers. Integrating this promise into every piece of communication to students will make your writing more interesting and more persuasive.

Yet, one question remains: Why should your audience believe you?

We have identified five supports for the brand promise: diverse perspectives, supportive environment, personal adventure, unlimited transformative opportunities, and enriching campus life. The next few pages spell out the facts underpinning each of these supports.

These supports make the brand promise believable, even unassailable. Be sure to include all five to support the brand promise in your communications.

## 1. DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Iowa State brand research shows that today's students want to be challenged to think differently. Just like they want to be encouraged to think independently. That's why experiencing a broad array of diverse perspectives is so important to them. Because being exposed to new ideas helps students form their own unique viewpoints and creative thoughts. At Iowa State, students have wonderfully distinctive opportunities to think like they never have before, and it's all because they're surrounded by:

- Students' unique perspectives
- Individuals from cultures other than their own
- Professors who encourage them to seek different viewpoints
- Programs that introduce them to thought-provoking ideas
- Undergraduate research opportunities designed to help them grow

Examples of copy lines to support the diverse perspectives pillar:

- Chase down new ideas.
- Listen to new voices.
- See the world through the world's eyes.

## 2. SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

One of the downsides of large universities is that students can feel like they're just a number. Consequently, support can feel hard to come by. Iowa State is different. We go out of our way to provide a supportive environment for all students so they can achieve their goals, whether academic or personal. And because students know we're standing behind them, they're able to freely create, explore, try, fail and then succeed – spectacularly. Our support includes:

- 1,700 faculty who give personal attention
- Learning communities ranked among the nation's best
- Resources like Student Career Services
- Understanding advisers
- Financial assistance
- Practical, hands-on experiences
- Strong sense of community where people are welcoming and friendly

Examples of copy lines to support the supportive environment pillar:

- You're surrounded by the spirit of the adventure.
- Don't be afraid to fail harder.
- Take risks knowing you're supported.

## 3. PERSONAL ADVENTURE

An Iowa State adventure is sure to change the course of a student's life. Sharing these personal adventure stories is a great way to communicate the type of students attracted to Iowa State, as well as highlight the incredible ways their lives have been influenced by their time here. These are just a few examples of the unique stories we've used to illustrate the brand promise:

- How an alum does groundbreaking work in his or her field
- How an Iowa State student entrepreneur is making waves before graduating
- How a professor shaped a student's future
- How an internship changed the path for a student
- How students turned a class project into a real-life product

Examples of copy lines to support the personal adventure pillar:

- You want something more from college.
- Make these years your years.
- Discover your future is in good hand. Your hands.

## 4. UNLIMITED TRANSFORMATIVE OPPORTUNITIES

Whether students are biology, art or engineering majors, one thing's the same – they want to have an Iowa State experience that helps them figure out who they're meant to be, while making the transition into their adult lives as easy and successful as possible. At Iowa State, students find a wealth of opportunities – both socially and academically – that help them become more confident and capable people who have the ability to impact the world, including:

- Study abroad programs in more than 50 countries
- Unique undergraduate research opportunities
- Leading entrepreneurship programs where students learn to be their own boss
- Nationally ranked learning communities that provide invaluable support
- More than 800 clubs and organizations for all types of interests

Examples of copy lines to support the unlimited transformative opportunities pillar:

- Find the courage to follow your heart.
- Become the spark that ignites change.
- Create your own identity.

## 5. ENRICHING CAMPUS LIFE

The student experience takes place both in and out of the classroom. At Iowa State, our campus life is designed to enrich student life, making it a fuller, more memorable experience. We have a wide variety of enriching programs and opportunities, including:

- More than 800 clubs and organizations
- Big 12 school spirit
- Unforgettable dorm life where new friends soon become old friends
- Diverse student population with students from 54 states and territories and 128 countries
- Strong traditions including homecoming, Hilton Magic and more
- Thriving intramurals with more than 11,500 participants
- Beautiful campus with a comfortable, clean, and safe environment
- Modern technology in and out of the classroom

Examples of copy lines to support the enriching campus life pillar:

- Your campus. Your adventure. Your future.
- You'll never be the same again.
- It's your time to shine.

## WHERE WE WERE VS. WHERE WE ARE TODAY

As you can probably already tell, our current brand supports differ from how we've talked about the Iowa State experience in the past. That's because research has shown that students today want something a little different than previous students. Take a look at how today's students differ from students in 2005:



That's why we've changed our brand promise from:

"Iowa State University uniquely offers a rich student environment characterized by unlimited academic and social opportunities offered in a comfortable friendly and supportive environment."

to:

"Iowa State University offers a transformative student experience rich in new ideas, diverse perspectives, and imaginative people so that students can be inspired to think differently and create change."

Hence, our approach to language needed to change to fit this new promise. Below you'll find some examples of how we communicated to our audiences in the past as opposed to how we are communicating to them today. By no means is this list exhaustive, but it will give you a good idea of how our brand has evolved.

### *Previous way of communicating*

Explore your passions

Discover your potential

Unlimited academic and social opportunities

Welcoming environment

### *Evolved way of communicating*

Realize your goals

Fulfill your potential

Unlimited opportunities to change yourself and the world

An environment that builds you up with support and allows you to shine

## INTEGRATING ADVENTURE INTO YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

Every piece of communication should use the five supports to the brand promise: diverse perspectives, supportive environment, personal adventure, unlimited transformative opportunities, and enriching campus life. To integrate adventure into your communications, think of how your college or program helps students create their adventure. Be as factual as possible.

Our unique advantage is that we offer a transformative student experience. By using the brand supports, you'll help drive home the promise that students will have an unforgettable adventure sure to transform their lives at Iowa State. Below are some areas that will help you explain to your audience why our unique advantage is true.

Communicate the ways your program and/or department helps transform students. Do you have thought leaders in your field that offer diverse perspectives? Do you have opportunities for students to lead and fulfill their goals?

Think about the full range of academic opportunities you offer students. Do you offer hands-on research? Do you have a study abroad program? What about entrepreneurial opportunities?

Consider the variety of opportunities you offer that allow students to interact socially. These might include learning communities, clubs, and networking with professionals in your field.

Ask yourself what your college or program does to make the experience more personal. Instead of generic claims like "personal attention," use concrete programs that ensure personal attention.



# WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE

Research showed us that students want to go to a college where they can chase down new ideas, follow their heart, and think different – all in a supportive environment. In other words, they wanted to create their adventure.

We also learned something else. There are certain subsets of students for which our brand promise meant different things. So, before you start to write your communications, you'll want to focus on the person you're talking to and what they want to hear – before you decide specifically what you want to say to them.

The following identifies six major audiences. Put yourself in the shoes of your audience and walk around a little. Try to think like them and get inside their heads.

## 1. PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS – GENERAL

Your largest audience is prospective students in general. In essence, they're looking forward to the most transformative four years of their lives. They want to listen to new voices and pose new questions. They want to be able to take risks, screw up, try again, and then succeed – spectacularly.

In other words, they want a culture that builds them up and allows them to shine on a campus that gives them the freedom to create their own identity. They want the college experience that Iowa State uniquely offers.

## 2. PROSPECTIVE TRANSFER STUDENTS

In general, transfer students have figured out a game plan. They have a major and have at least some idea as to a career. They're interested in the academic and leadership programs you offer, both inside and outside the classroom. They're especially interested in internships, networking opportunities, and career services.

Transfer students also want the social opportunities we offer as well. It was one thing they were missing out on – and craving – while they prepared to go to Iowa State.

## 3. PROSPECTIVE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Predominantly, international students are interested in the academic experience. These students will travel thousands of miles to go to Iowa State because of our reputation as a technological leader, a place where breakthroughs happen. They want to learn from pioneering scholars in their field, getting hands-on experience in the process. When writing for prospective international students, emphasize your academic and leadership programs both inside and outside the classroom and any relevant academic rankings.

Don't forget that these students are far from home and from their friends. Iowa State's friendly, supportive environment will help them fit in faster. For them, Iowa State helps them prepare for a career on a campus that makes them feel at home.

## 4. PROSPECTIVE OUT-OF-STATE STUDENTS

Students who consider enrolling in college out of state tend to put more emphasis on academics. They want the prestige of an advanced research institution. They want to learn from leading scholars in their field. They want to study abroad. They want to get hands-on experience. They want to network with prominent professionals.

When you write communications for prospective out-of-state students, talk about the academic and leadership programs you offer both inside and outside the classroom. Emphasize how Iowa State can give them the tools and the opportunities to change the world, to make a difference. For them, creating their adventure means preparing for a career they'll be passionate about for the rest of their lives.

## 5. PROSPECTIVE UNDECIDED STUDENTS

It's not unusual for some students to be unsure of the academic path they want to take. These undecided or open option major students need to be reassured that their path is waiting for them and that their college years are for figuring themselves out. Iowa State is the perfect place to do that because students will find a major university with unlimited academic programs, including 100 majors. So they can check them out to find which major fits them best – and have confidence knowing all academic majors are of highest quality.

Just as importantly, Iowa State has a supportive environment with 1,700 faculty who take the time to get to know students personally and help them get where they want to go.

At Iowa State, undecided students will find the options they want and the support they need to fulfill their potential and create their adventure.

## 6. PARENTS

While parents want their sons and daughters to enjoy the experience of college, they also want to be assured that going to Iowa State is a wise investment. For this audience, emphasize academic opportunities both inside and outside the classroom. Include internships, networking, and career placement rates.

Remember, these are parents you're talking to. They want to hear that their daughters and sons get personal attention and guidance from our professors and advisers. They want to know about our learning communities that help students succeed academically and socially. And parents love hearing about how our campus is safe and friendly, with resources like the Help Van, SafeRide, ISUAlert, and more available day and night. Parents want their students to have the adventure of a lifetime. Safely.

# STRATEGIES TO CONNECT

## PERSONAL STORIES

One of the ways to connect with this audience is by telling personal stories of actual students. What were they looking for when they came to college? Was there a class, professor or roommate that supported the direction of their life? If so, how did they impact or help change their world view? Did they study abroad? Was there a club that influenced them? Did they land an amazing internship that is leading to a career they've been dreaming of for years?

These stories come alive by finding the turning point, the game changer, the spark. And be sure to include interesting details.

## WHAT IS IT REALLY LIKE

Your audience wants to know what it's like to walk around campus on a crisp fall afternoon. They want to witness the architecture, both classic and contemporary. They want to feel the spaciousness, the serenity, the beauty. They want to experience school spirit and the endless activities: M-Shop concerts, thriving intramurals, Hilton Magic, unforgettable dorm life, and more. They want to smell spring, experience diverse perspectives from other students, enjoy Big 12 sports from the student section.

In a word, they want to know what it is really like to live on the campus voted among the most beautiful in the country. It's as close to the ideal university experience that there is. Capture it in your writing and in the photos you use.

## FACTS THAT MATTER

We've talked a lot about the emotional aspects of the brand message. While those are very important, they need to be supported by facts whenever possible, such as:

- *Money* magazine names Iowa State the best college value in Iowa.
- *U.S. News & World Report* ranks Iowa State the number one graduate and undergraduate program in agricultural and biosystems engineering and one of the top 25 programs for aerospace; chemical; civil; electrical/electronic; industrial and manufacturing systems; and materials engineering.
- Iowa State's campus is consistently voted among the most beautiful in the country.
- We have some of the largest college career fairs in America.
- More than 94 percent of Iowa State students get placed in the careers or graduate schools they desire.
- Our study abroad program reaches every continent.

Your audience doesn't want a barrage of facts. But they do want facts that back up any claim you make. In other words, facts that matter. Be sure your communications include them.

## SUMMARY

In summary, to make your communications more effective, follow these simple steps:

Identify your audience. Think about where their heads are, about what is important to them.

Connect with your audience in the brand voice, while sharing personal stories to capture what it's really like at Iowa State. In your stories, include facts about your college or program that matter.

Use all five supports to the brand promise: diverse perspectives, supportive environment, personal adventure, unlimited transformative opportunities, and enriching campus life. The order of importance and the concrete examples you use will depend on your audience.

Integrate the brand promise into every piece of communication you develop. Your audience will love knowing they can have the adventure of a lifetime at Iowa State. And you'll love the success you've created writing for your college and/or program.

# IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY BRAND POSITIONING

Iowa State University offers a transformative student experience rich in new ideas, diverse perspectives, and imaginative people, so that students can be inspired to think differently and create change.

## IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY BRAND MANIFESTO

You want something  
more from college.

A place where you can  
make these years...  
your years.

To chase down new ideas.  
Pose new questions.  
Listen to new voices.

See the world through  
the world's eyes.

Where you are surrounded  
by the spirit of adventure.  
Inspired by brilliant minds.  
Empowered by innovation.  
Challenged by the world's  
problems.

So you can become the  
spark that ignites change.

Where you can take risks.  
Screw up. Try again.  
Then succeed...  
spectacularly.

Iowa State University  
is such a place.

A culture that builds you up.  
And allows you to shine.

A campus that gives you  
the freedom to create your  
own identity.  
Your own self.  
Your own brand.

Where you'll find  
the courage to  
follow your heart.  
To think different.  
To be different.

And discover your  
future is in good hands.  
Your hands.

Once you've been  
on this adventure,  
you will never be  
the same again.

Create your adventure.