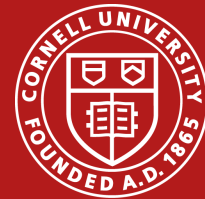


Behind the Brand



From Insights to Purpose

Cornell **CALS** College of Agriculture
and Life Sciences

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Project Goals

We sought to understand how the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) is perceived today, what it embodies in full, and how to position it in the future.

It is our mission as a Land-Grant university to keep up with the rate of change, to serve our future generations by fostering cutting-edge research, education, and outreach. To support this, we need a consistent visual identity as well as clear and concise messaging about the college's many strengths and complexities. Having these tools at hand will give our extended community a more cohesive way to express who we are in words and in visual design.

So how will we know if this project is successful? We'll begin to notice:

Modernize perceived image of CALS and position it as a global thought leader in food and agriculture.

Unify CALS departments around a shared sense of focus, mission, and impact.

Position CALS among its competitive set to increase new student admission and attract bright, new faculty.

Draw more dollars and more public and media attention to CALS research.

Elevate CALS alumni and stakeholder engagement.

Bolster cross-campus collaboration. Improve program rankings.

Enhance and spread pride in CALS, both on and beyond campus.

Engaging the Community

Understanding CALS

We conducted a range of research activities with over 300 stakeholders from across CALS and beyond.

In-person Interviews with faculty, students, staff, and administration

Interviews with CALS and Cornell leadership

Interviews with prospective students and their parents

Interviews with college counselors & higher education experts

Interviews with agriculture experts

Individual and group interviews with CALS alumni

Interviews with stakeholders in Albany

Feedback Sessions

We sought user feedback throughout the project. After an initial design phase, we conducted several rounds of research to solicit feedback CALS stakeholders.

Student, faculty, and staff feedback sessions

Design Social and Open House feedback

Advisory Council presentation and workshop

Brand Survey

In addition to in-person research, we conducted a survey to learn from a large number of alumni, faculty, students, and other stakeholders.

In the survey we reached:

85 Students

125 Alumni

59 Faculty

57 Staff

39 Friends of CALS

28 Parents of CALS students

From Insights to Purpose

Our Design Research was designed to uncover the key qualities of CALS—what motivates and drives its students and faculty, how it touches and impacts external stakeholders, and how it reaches prospective students. The goal was to find and articulate a through-line from what is true about CALS today to what prospective students and faculty want from a college and what the public can be inspired by tomorrow.

From Insights to Purpose

During our research, we gained deep insight into the essence of CALS. We learned that at the core of CALS lies:

- *A dedication to and practice of interdisciplinary inquiry and collaboration across disciplines*
- *A passion for and commitment to understanding our changing world and making it a better place, through basic or applied research*
- *Scientific inquiry and discovery, in every field from Biology to Food Science to Sociology*

We also learned about the shared values between CALS and prospective students. Specifically, that prospective students have grown up in an interdisciplinary world – they don't see “majors” or “disciplines” but rather, see issues or challenges they want to solve. We also learned that they share CALS' passion for having an impact on the world.

External stakeholders, including donors and stakeholders in Albany, are also highly motivated to see CALS' impact in the world, especially in New York. CALS is a key player in contributing to the well-being of New York State, and needs to continue to serve New York's changing needs.

These overlapping core values lead us to a purpose statement to position and guide CALS:

“CALS tackles the challenges of our times through purpose-driven science that advances understanding and improves life.”

Insights and Opportunities

In addition to providing a foundation from which to build the CALS purpose statement, our research also influenced the visual design, key messaging, content strategy, and brand activation concepts. Below is a synthesis of what we learned in the field, and a summary of how we addressed that opportunity in our design.

Insight & Opportunity #1

INSIGHT:

There are three common misperceptions about CALS that the new CALS brand has an opportunity to change:

Perception	Reality
CALS' curriculum and research is heavily influenced by "Big Ag."	Protecting people & the planet – not corporate profit– are CALS' priorities.
"Land Grant" is a meaningless term that keeps us in the past.	The essence of the Land Grant mission is what obliges us to look to the future.
CALS is not the "real" Cornell.	CALS is just as rigorous and selective as other Cornell Colleges.

OPPORTUNITY:

How might we begin to align perception with reality?

The CALS purpose and messaging formalizes our commitment to improving life and protecting people and the planet. We have also formalized our stance on integrity in our research to further combat the perception that we are influenced by "Big Ag."

We have emphasized "Cornell" in our visual design, while still maintaining a strong sense of self with the unique CALS logo. We have also formally articulated our high academic standards.

Everything from the visual design to our spheres of inquiry to our experience concepts are designed to illustrate that CALS is always looking to the future. We use active verbs and emphasize questions we're asking and challenges we're solving.

Insight & Opportunity #2

INSIGHT:

Without an invitation to look beyond stereotypes, the word “agriculture” feels narrow and exclusive.

CALS' first battle is its biggest one – everyone needs agriculture, but few understand the breadth of issues, disciplines, and challenges that agriculture influences. Because CALS lacks a meaningful way to illustrate its breadth beyond (but including) agriculture, CALS often ends up apologizing for it.

OPPORTUNITIES:

How might we move forward without losing our roots?

To move forward without losing CALS' roots, we developed a framework to illustrate that CALS has adapted to meet the changing needs of society without listing every CALS initiative, department or research project.

The Spheres of Inquiry in the CALS messaging are designed to be more than a visual to put on one-sheets. The Spheres serve as a filter to help CALS decide what content to publish, what classes to teach, what speeches to host, etc. Each brand behavior (i.e., thing that CALS does)

should tie back to at least one of the Spheres of Inquiry. By distributing CALS' behaviors across the Spheres, CALS will communicate through its behavior that it is a multidimensional college whose impact extends far beyond agriculture (but still includes Ag).

How might we dimensionalize agriculture in a meaningful way?

To dimensionalize agriculture, we've recommended that CALS embrace and express the key messaging pillar of “Interdisciplinary Culture.” When creating content about Agricultural projects or research, emphasize the overlaps with other disciplines. Miguel Gomez's project “Developing a Sustainable Coffee Cost of Production Calculation Tool for Smallholder Farmers in Latin America,” for example, is “Agriculture,” but it is also Economics, Product Design, Info Science, Ornithology, and Plant Science. By illustrating through content (whether its news stories, a brag book, or a one-sheet) that agriculture is actually many things, you give dimension to agriculture in meaningful ways.

State the Stakes. This is one of our storytelling principles. We learned in our research that people do not identify with “agriculture,” but they are inspired by the world – solving global hunger, eating more sustainable food, etc. As you are writing content related to agriculture, make sure that the stakes are clear upfront. Focus less on the terminology of “agriculture” and more on the problem you're trying to solve.

We have also visually united “Agriculture” with “Change” in the CALS logo. With the new CALS logo, “Agriculture” becomes synonymous with change. It is a changing and evolving discipline and practice.

Insight & Opportunity #3

INSIGHT:

People are inspired by the world, not by a laundry list of majors.

Students and prospective students might not know exactly what they want to do, but they do know what types of problems they want to solve. To them, college is about discovering what kind of impact they could have on the world. Right now, nobody is connecting the dots between a list of departments and the types of problems CALS is tackling. People are driven to action by “Discovering a Cure for Migraines” or “Combating Cyberbullying” – not “Plant Sciences” or “Communication.”

OPPORTUNITY:

How might we communicate what we do in terms of our impact, rather than an org chart?

This was a critical question for us as we created the CALS spheres of Inquiry. The spheres of inquiry are designed to illustrate the breadth of issues we tackle, rather than the disciplines we organize ourselves by.

To further emphasize our impact, we've recommended a new approach to storytelling that emphasizes what is at stake and the impact CALS had on the given issue.

Insight & Opportunity #4

INSIGHT:

Without a cohesive vision, the CALS experience feels arbitrary.

Students feel part of Cornell and a major, not CALS. To them, “CALS” represents a set of distribution requirements. CALS is a list of boxes they have to check, not a tribe they belong to. Faculty and students crave a sense of focus that fosters a deeper sense of community and shared purpose.

OPPORTUNITY:

How might we make the CALS experience feel more intentional?

The purpose statement and Spheres of Inquiry articulate how and why CALS exists at Cornell. Both of these elements should be used widely, to foster a shared sense of purpose and intention at CALS.

We’ve also recommended several experience concepts that bring the shared CALS purpose to life in key moments: a student’s first day of school, a first year’s first week of classes, and a moment of communal reflection. By articulating the CALS purpose in key moments, CALS forefronts its unifying attributes rather than leaving it to students to figure that out on their own.

Insight & Opportunity #5

INSIGHT:

Without facilitated moments of convergence, collaboration is left to happenstance.

Collaboration and the ability to move between areas of exploration is widely revered as critical to solving the kinds problems CALS is tackling. Faculty's proudest accomplishments are often achieved through collaboration across CALS, or even across the University. A lack of a system that articulates how and when disciplines engage with one another leads to siloing and confusion about how to navigate the options.

OPPORTUNITIES:

How might we elevate the collaboration process and make its outcomes visible?

We have elevated the collaboration process by making Interdisciplinary Inquiry a key messaging pillar for the College. In addition, the Spheres of Inquiry Diagram, which allows for overlaps between the spheres, reinforces the idea that there are, indeed, overlaps and collaborations.

In addition to Collaboration being a key message, we've recommended an approach to content that provides an opportunity to make the outcomes of collaboration visible.

We've also introduced a Venn Diagram structure in provocations to show that research projects are an outcome of many disciplines collaborating.

How might we make a strong vision for CALS both known and felt?

Our experience concepts are designed to bring the CALS vision to life for both internal and external stakeholders in key moments. Each concept is designed to either facilitate or communicate one of our key messaging pillars: Intellectual Exploration, Interdisciplinary Culture, and Meaningful Impact.

Insight & Opportunity #6

INSIGHT:

People are craving conversation, and nobody can hear your voice.

Zika. Vector Control. Sustainability. Climate Change. GMOs. The Social Media Bubble. CALS is well poised to facilitate conversations that people are dying to have. People know you have the expertise to provoke a conversation, and wonder why you're shying away from the opportunity.

OPPORTUNITIES:

How might we engage people by being the safe place for dangerous questions?

We have recommended several concepts focused on positioning CALS as a thought leader and to establish CALS as a leader in scientific inquiry. We've recommended bringing influencers together to discuss meaningful and provocative topics, and developing a new level of content that asks large, global questions.

In addition, we have incorporated the motif of questions into the one-sheeter and other CALS collateral to further reinforce that CALS is a college of inquiry.

Insight & Opportunity #7

INSIGHT:

Prospective students are trying to picture themselves in your world, but you're not speaking their language.

They are living in a #nofilter world. They want real, "behind-the-scenes" stories from people like them. Your competition is Snapchat. If you can't say it in 2 minutes, they won't hear it.

OPPORTUNITY:

How might we bring CALS to life in short, but meaningful ways?

During our research we learned that prospective students are craving succinct ways to engage with and understand CALS. We've created the opportunity for them to do so in several ways:

By establishing a strong visual identity for CALS through a distinctive logo and engaging photography, we have created a visual shorthand that allows prospective students to more easily "get the vibe" and purpose of CALS.

In our Content Playbook, we've outlined both social media guidance as well as guidance for "Fieldnotes." Student interest stories, stories about new classes, and student life can be transformed from longer, formally reported stories into lighthearted content written from the first person.

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