



Department of Marketing, Public Relations and Communications

Strategic Communications/Unit Plan

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. Overview

The advent of 2010 finds the Peralta Community College District at a critical juncture. Dramatic cuts to community colleges resulting from the state budget crunch have reduced Peralta Colleges' ability to provide access to students amid a reduction in the number of classes. At the same time, a series of press stories on alleged conflicts of interest, tracking of credit card expenses and management compensation have resulted in negative publicity for the District.

In the fall of 2009, GCA Strategies was commissioned by the Department of Marketing, Public Relations and Communications (hereafter "Marketing Department") to identify approaches and programs to enhance Peralta Colleges' communications capabilities. This effort will help maintain staff and faculty morale, preserve public support for college operations and future local bond measures, and prevent lasting damage to the District's reputation.

GCA accordingly initiated work on a strategic communications plan to serve as a roadmap to improve awareness and the public image of the Peralta Colleges, in order to help the District better accomplish its mission for students and the region. The consultants first conducted a series of small-group and individual in-depth confidential interviews with a total of 21 stakeholders. The firm also conducted a brief communications audit, evaluating District publications, website, press releases, news clippings and other materials, with a detailed review of the its social media presence and Peralta TV potentially reserved for later.

The results of this effort and specific recommendations for improving strategic communications in the face of the critical public affairs challenges facing the district are outlined below.

B. Positioning and Branding

The following positioning statement is designed to differentiate and improve perceptions of the Peralta Colleges:

The Peralta Community College District provides affordable quality education for highly diverse students from its area to pursue a wide range of life-changing opportunities in a caring teaching environment.

Distilling this positioning statement to its essence leaves us with this brand: **Peralta Colleges: Life-Changing Education.** The positioning statement should guide District management to make sure we are all talking off the same page in communications, while the brand provides a succinct theme.

C. General Strategic Approach

In the coming months, Peralta Colleges must increase focus on public relations and public affairs efforts designed to safeguard and strengthen its reputation. Given the increasing number of students seeking classes at the Peralta Colleges due to the effects of the recession coupled with reduced placement at University of California and California State University campuses, the District's emphasis can be safely shifted away from marketing for enrollment purposes to concentrate on public relations challenges.

The Department of Marketing must seek stakeholder buy-in for all major communications initiatives in this plan, particularly those that will require acceptance by key internal audiences.

D. Electronic Media / Publications

The Peralta Colleges' websites are critical for branding and disseminating strategic communications messages. The Marketing Department should continue to retain control over the website homepage, which should be revised to feature the Peralta Colleges brand. In accordance with the Department's plans for using *GovDelivery*, other electronic forms of social media communications should now be utilized more extensively, including email and electronic newsletters. These media allow the Peralta Colleges to more fully control the message, especially in communicating with students, faculty and staff. The consultants recommend that the Department of Marketing's current award-winning print publications be maintained, including specifically the retention of much-utilized paper class schedules to compliment online access to schedules.

E. News Media Relations

The Peralta Colleges should develop a proactive approach to news media relations, utilizing public policy advocacy approaches (e.g., editorial boards, opinion columns, and talk show participation) as well as pitching news and feature story ideas. In particular, the Department should research and actively pitch success stories and personality features devoted to student and faculty achievements. Because the Department currently has little time to promote coverage of positive news, we recommend use of student interns as a resource to research and generate success stories. Topical stories (e.g., a disaster or major health crisis where faculty expertise is relevant) can also be utilized to promote favorable coverage.

GCA recommends creation of a district factbook emphasizing economic and other measurable contributions by The Peralta Colleges to the community. This online fact sheet would include information such as the District's return on

investment to the community, number of jobs provided/generated, economic activity generated by District expenditures, local businesses that benefit, and number of students graduated or trained. GCA Strategies also recommends a pilot program to create a media reference guide. This online database of faculty with professional expertise in certain key fields who are available to respond to news media queries can increase awareness of Peralta Colleges capabilities.

Two types of media deserve special emphasis. Pitching stories and events to the business press is highly recommended, especially job creation/economic recovery features. Finally, the Department should consider stepped-up outreach to Hispanic media if resources permit.

Finally, for selected media, placement of a regular (e.g., monthly) or occasional column authored by Peralta College senior leaders (Chancellor or College Presidents) may be welcomed.

While a proactive approach is important, sometimes the Peralta Colleges will need to react strongly and promptly. Conducting media relations training and creating a crisis communications plan can help prepare for public affairs challenges in advance.

F. Community Outreach

Creation of a speakers bureau and solicitation of opportunities for key leaders to speak to civic groups and at public forums is highly recommended.

Formation of a community advisory council would allow the Chancellor to communicate with key stakeholders and influencers frequently and systematically to understand their perspectives on key district initiatives and educate them on issues of mutual interest. Further, this program could assist in developing important strategic alliances and provide third party endorsements on key policy initiatives among elected officials and key community leaders from the business, education, nonprofit and faith communities. Apart from this initiative, GCA Strategies recommends that the District conduct ongoing outreach to federal, state and local elected officials. Finally, other businesses and trade associations might be solicited for pro-bono advertising donations.

Literally hundreds of thousands of Peralta Colleges alumni live or work in the East Bay. We highly recommend providing communications support for the alumni association as a means of encouraging a stronger ongoing connection with this important audience.

Media stories are often created around the backdrop of a particular event or public forum. Since the economic recovery will continue to be a major news story, the District may wish to consider hosting a jobs summit with a prominent

keynote speaker that highlights the role the Peralta Colleges have to play in the East Bay's economic recovery. The summit should then be well-publicized.

G. Targeted Audiences

Communications must include targeted messages and media vehicles aimed at the following audiences (see *Section V* for details):

Internal Audiences

- Faculty
- Staff
- Students
- Alumni

External Audiences

- Taxpayers and voters
- Public officials
- Prospective students and student influencers
- Strategic partners and donors
- Businesses

H. Additional Recommendations Outside the Department

Additional recommendations for implementation by other departments can assist in improving communications and enhancing the Peralta Colleges' image. These include creation of a part-time ombudsman position; adoption of best practices on ethics policies; revision of the District website to include fewer home page links, more visuals, greater consistency between college sites and improved materials for international students; and, increased email communications to K-12 referrers.

II. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

The Peralta Community College District recently commissioned GCA Strategies to perform a limited communications audit, inventory resources and conduct interviews with stakeholders. Based on this research and a site visit, GCA has drafted a strategic communications plan for the District that includes program recommendations and activities for specific target audiences.

The purpose of this strategic communications plan is to develop a roadmap to help:

- 1) Improve awareness of Peralta Community College District and its colleges;
- 2) Effectively and ethically enhance public opinion; and,
- 3) Motivate behavior to enable the District to better accomplish its mission of creating opportunities for students and enhancing the region's development.

The initiatives and tactics set forth in this plan are directed at forming what key audiences believe about the Peralta Colleges and affecting what they do in response to what they believe.

We cannot just say that the District's goals are good and our audiences should support them. Rather, we must understand our audiences and their interests, align our interests with theirs, provide expertise and information to assist them, increase their awareness, involve them, seek their feedback and invest in a variety of communications channels to repetitively communicate a consistent set of messages.

Note: This strategic plan is designed to focus on recommendations for improvement in communications. It is important to not lose sight of the professional job done by the Marketing Department in communicating with various audiences despite limited resources. Of necessity, this report spends little time taking note of that office's excellent existing programs. It is important to clarify that this plan is not intended as a criticism of these efforts.

B. Overview

1. Initial Scope of Work

As part of this program, small-group and individual executive interviews were conducted with a total of 21 stakeholders, including the former president of the Board of Trustees, administrators, staff, faculty, students and a high school counselor, as well as the College PIOs and the

Executive Director of Marketing, Public Relations and Communications and his staff.

District publications including class schedules, the independent *Laney Tower* student newspaper, the 2008 Annual Report, quarterly Chancellor's Reports, press releases and marketing collateral materials were examined and assessed as part of the communications audit. Recent newsclippings and the District website were also reviewed, and GCA also briefly reviewed the District's internet presence.

This strategic communications plan is designed to assist in the development of realistic communications and public affairs goals and positioning statements for the District and its colleges, as well as to recommend program activities.

2. Limitations and Ongoing Objectives

This strategic plan is limited in scope; it did not review certain communications elements in detail in deference to time and budgetary constraints. With the approval of the District, GCA can later review those programs that received only a cursory look, including Peralta TV and the District's social media presence. As part of this second phase, we can also review tapes of focus groups previously conducted for the District. Should the District request this additional analysis, the strategic communications plan could then be updated. GCA will also be available to assist the District's Executive Director of Marketing, Public Relations and Communications with implementation of recommended programs over the coming months as needed.

C. Situation Analysis

1. Peralta Community College District Mission

We are a collaborative community of colleges.

"Together, we provide educational leadership for the East Bay, delivering programs and services that sustainably enhance the region's human, economic, environmental, and social development.

We empower our students to achieve their highest aspirations. We develop leaders who create opportunities and transform lives.

Together with our partners, we provide our diverse students and communities with equitable access to the educational resources, experiences, and life-long opportunities to meet and exceed their goals."

2. Challenges

Student satisfaction with their experience at the Peralta Colleges is overwhelmingly high, with more than three-quarters (78%) rating it outstanding/good according to a 2009 survey of 491 students. Nonetheless, the Peralta Community College District currently faces a number of critical challenges in performing its mission, including a severe economic recession, unprecedented state budget cuts and resultant student tuition increases. These in turn have resulted in student protests and loss of morale among faculty and staff.

While President Obama has recognized the crucial role that community colleges play in economic recovery ("We will not fill those (skilled, well-paying) jobs, or keep those jobs on our shores, without the training offered by community colleges"), the number of students Peralta and other community colleges can accommodate is now restricted by dramatically reduced state revenue support.

The reduction in state support in turn has reduced the District's ability to provide access to a very diverse range of the region's population, including basic education pupils and students enrolled in vocational certificate programs. Meanwhile, the number of students hoping to begin their baccalaureate education at the Peralta Colleges before transferring to UC or CSU has significantly increased due to the decline in California's funding of state 4-year college programs.

At the same time, the District has received extensive negative publicity during the past year over alleged conflicts of interest, management salary increases, tracking of credit card expenses and transparency issues in print publications and their online sites as well as by the broadcast media.

However, tough times also breed opportunity. The Peralta Colleges' faculty and staff have become more productive, and tuition/fees for certain types of students (e.g., contract education and international students) can potentially enhance District budgets.

As classes are cut and students protest fee increases, better communications should be paramount. Failure to plan for future communications problems means the Peralta Colleges could suffer in the public esteem, endangering not only the District's reputation but also its facilities (think future bond measures) and programs.

Generating positive news coverage of Peralta Colleges will not be easy, since just over 2 percent of news coverage of education nationwide is devoted to community colleges. Even though nearly 7 million students are enrolled in two-year institutions in the U.S. compared to 11 million for four-year colleges and universities, community colleges attract only one-tenth the news

coverage of four-year institutions. This relative invisibility in news coverage can only be overcome through creative and diligent media relations efforts.

3. Print Publications Audit

GCA Strategies reviewed selected District printed publications and materials and generally found them to be of high quality and useful. Materials included class schedules, the 2008 Annual Report, quarterly Chancellor's Reports, press releases, and marketing collateral materials. Graphics, photos and printing quality are generally excellent; press releases focused on appropriate messages and are well written.

Students overwhelmingly (88%) find the class schedules to be clear and easy to use, according to a 2009 survey of students. Both the printed and online schedules are used by a plurality (39%) of students, while 34% use only the printed version.

The independently-published *Laney Tower* student newspaper is widely distributed, and may present communications opportunities as well as challenges. Comments on the communications audit of other programs are contained below under Recommendations.

III. POSITIONING STATEMENT

The following positioning statement, messages and program recommendations are designed to assist in improving communication and enhance the Peralta Colleges' reputation with the general public and stakeholders. The approach used to shape these is set forth in Appendix A: Key Principles of a Strategic Communications Plan.

A. Positioning Statement

The most compelling and differentiating attributes of the Peralta Community College District are summarized in this statement:

The Peralta Community College District provides affordable quality education for highly diverse students from its area to pursue a wide range of life-changing opportunities in a caring teaching environment.

B. Elements of the Positioning Statement

1. *Quality Education:*
 - Refers to the colleges' most significant community benefit. District faculty members are highly qualified (50 percent of Berkeley City College faculty possess a doctorate degree, to cite just one example).
 - Describes a widely-shared judgment backed by independent outside evaluation.
2. *Highly Diverse Students:*
 - Describes the District's student population, which varies widely by age, ethnicity, educational goals, socio-economic background, skill levels and country of origin.
 - Characterizes the District's range of instructional opportunities designed to meet the needs of those on the following educational tracks: 1) students who will ultimately transfer to a 4-year college; 2) basic education students; 3) vocational education students; 4) high school students; and 5) lifelong learners.
 - Suggests the accessibility that is characteristic of California community colleges, including the Peralta Colleges.
3. *Life-Changing Opportunities:*
 - Demonstrates the major impact that a Peralta Colleges education can have on people from all walks of life.
 - Suggests the prospect for significant improvement for careers (jobs and job-creation are top-of-mind issues for most currently), social change and quality of life that are offered through the Peralta Colleges.

4. *Caring Teaching Environment:*

- Captures the commitment of the faculty and staff of the Peralta Colleges to assist their students.
- Describes the opportunity for student interaction on a close personal basis with teaching faculty.

5. *Affordable Education:*

- Provides a platform for focusing on the still favorable opportunity-cost of a Peralta Colleges education despite the nationwide recession and state budget cutbacks.
- Differentiates Peralta from all other educational institutions in the six-city region of the Bay Area.

C. Branding

Distilling this positioning statement to its essence leaves us with this brand:

Peralta Colleges: Life-Changing Education

Most communications to internal and external audiences should feature messages promoting this brand, because this will improve perceptions of the Peralta Colleges and ultimately promote positive behavior such as support for funding of facilities.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are presented as the initial basis for enhancing the Peralta Community College District's communications to internal and external audiences.

A. General Strategic Approach

1. Seek and create stakeholder buy-in. As part of the Peralta Colleges' shared governance culture, major communications initiatives will require acceptance by key audiences (e.g., the College academic senates). Important stakeholders should be debriefed on the strategic communications plan, including the Senior Management Team.
2. Shift focus from marketing to communications. The District should consider partially modifying its short-term focus and resources from marketing to communications/public relations, because of economic trends and state and district budget cuts. To restate this slightly, the goal should be to refocus away from public awareness toward better communication of the District's successes. With classes and student populations reduced (and more UC and CSU transfer students targeting community colleges), the need to increase awareness of classes for potential students has lessened. In contrast, the need to reinforce and enhance public impressions of the Peralta Colleges are greater than ever, due to recent negative media coverage.

(Note: Exceptions may be warranted to maintain existing marketing efforts directed at certain audiences. These may include communications aimed at recruiting and retaining basic education students, under-represented students and outreach for revenue-producing programs. Basic education and under-represented students might be left out if insufficient outreach efforts are not made to encourage them to sign up for classes on a timely basis. Communications aimed at international student programs and contract (fee-based) classes may warrant increased priority because they will generate additional revenue for classrooms and operations. Additionally, nothing herein should be construed to indicate that valuable marketing programs such as publication of class schedules should be reduced. Similarly, care must be taken to preserve relationships with key referrers.)

3. Create a timeline for implementing changes: Programs without significant budget impacts can be implemented now. A few programs, especially those that require budgetary decisions, may take longer to

implement, but this should not prevent most initiatives recommended here from going forward in the meantime, since they are not significant cost items. GCA Strategies is available to work with the marketing office to identify and prioritize actions and estimate implementation costs as necessary.

B. Electronic Media

1. Focus on the District website home page to improve strategic communications: The Peralta Colleges website and particularly its home page should be viewed as a critical vehicle for branding and strategic communications, as well as quotidian use. While a wholesale website makeover might eventually be justified (see Appendix B), making small, inexpensive changes now to the home page can make a world of difference in how the college is perceived. We recommend that the Marketing Department retain control of the home page for branding purposes, and that the District's brand be prominently featured on the home page
2. Utilize email and electronic newsletters more fully. The District has recently enrolled in an email subscription management program. The use of the *GovDelivery* automated system of email, wireless alerts (including texting) and RSS to students offers excellent opportunities to communicate key messages and valuable information. This system is particularly useful in notifying students of new website content. Plans for use of this subscription management program should be made with an eye on strategic communications goals and coordinated by the Executive Director of Marketing, Public Relations and Communications. This is a useful medium for disseminating success stories and interesting visuals that promote key messages, including via social media, which can increase dissemination exponentially. The system should also be used to promote existing dialogue sessions between the Peralta Colleges' leadership and staff, faculty and students. Finally, use of email to faculty and staff is equally important.

C. News Media Relations

1. Create a factbook emphasizing economic contributions: Reporters and other influencers would benefit from an online factsheet about the District. This factbook would package information in an accessible format and highlight the District's contributions to the community, particularly in the economic sphere. It might include the District's return on investment to the community, number of jobs provided/generated, economic activity generated by District expenditures, local businesses

that benefit from facilities construction or training, number of students graduated or trained, enrollment, well-known alumni, number of UC/CSU transfer students, and other valuable facts that the public does not know regarding the District. This should also attempt to quantify the District's contributions to the regional economy and local industries, including numbers of former students represented in the workforce. The factbook can be widely disseminated to other key audiences beyond the media as necessary.

2. Approach News Media Proactively: A more proactive approach to news media can enhance the District's image. This involves promoting direct advocacy (opinion columns, editorial board meetings, media outreach) as well as softer approaches detailed below. Despite an overall proactive approach, the District must also be prepared to react by offering a rapid rebuttal whenever potentially damaging charges are aired in the media (see Media Training and Crisis Communications below).
3. Develop a crisis communications plan. The Peralta Colleges should develop a district-wide plan to act in case of crisis. This includes not only communications in the event of emergencies, natural disasters or major criminal incidents, but also to deal with public affairs crises as needed to protect the District from critical challenges to its public reputation.

The former requires detailed advance planning for instant coordination and communications with large numbers of community members; the latter requires being prepared to respond quickly in today's atmosphere of "gotcha" journalism. When government investigations, lawsuits or allegations of improprieties occur, the media firestorm can quickly overwhelm the ability of educational institutions to effectively respond to the demands of the crisis.

The Peralta Colleges must be prepared to offer a rapid rebuttal whenever potentially damaging charges that are inaccurate or misleading are aired in the media; such charges may not just fade away. To emerge with its reputation intact, the organization must be prepared in advance to anticipate, move and respond immediately and with confidence. Crisis communications plans typically include:

- Development of a rapid response capability;
- Identification and immediate access to key decision-makers and spokespersons;
- Proactive media outreach;
- Crafting compelling messages;

- Recruiting third-party allies who can credibly voice those messages; and,
 - Media training for key personnel.
4. Conduct media relations training: As noted above, the District should consider conducting media training for key personnel, including key management (including the Chancellor and college presidents), trustees, and other spokespersons as needed. Such training should take place before a potential public relations crisis happens, and focus on skills applicable to any media situation, including message development and techniques for bridging to core messages. The training will focus on interview basics, role playing, understanding of the media and compelling news angles, and tips for one-on-one interviews as well as press conferences. Training will be tailored to help the Peralta Colleges' executives meet the information needs of differing types of media and describe the ground rules of engagement.
 5. Encourage Op Ed columns and talk show participation: Opinion pieces that advocate pro-Peralta messages and themes should be pitched, drafted and placed with news media publications. For example, advocacy about the importance of community colleges to the economic recovery might be well-received in this climate, and numerous other story topics will be evident over time. The District should also seek meetings with editorial boards to encourage coverage of workforce education and the Peralta Colleges' role as an economic engine, and seek to place the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor and college presidents on relevant talk shows (e.g., KQED-FM's *Forum* with Michael Krasny) on this and similar topics.
 6. Emphasize business: Potential features and stories should be actively pitched to news media devoted to business, including daily news publications, the *Oakland Business Review*, the *San Francisco Business Times*, and other print publications, online sites and broadcast media. In particular, such media may be interested in job creation stories, events and forums. These media and trade or corporate publications may also post brief announcements or stories regarding contract education.
 7. Encourage key management personnel to submit a regular column: News media editors at community publications/websites (e.g., *The Montclairion*) should be solicited to accept a regular or occasional column from the Chancellor and/or College presidents.
 8. Actively pitch success stories. A concerted program to more actively pitch coverage of Peralta Colleges' success stories to the news media should be developed and implemented. This initiative can help disseminate positive messages and counterbalance negative

perceptions of the Peralta Colleges, especially with audiences where the District has relatively low visibility (e.g., taxpayers). Such positive media coverage can also improve morale and productivity among key internal audiences. This program may include creation of an integrated District-wide communications task force (including College PIOs) designed to identify potential stories and prioritize action. These news stories and features should primarily focus on: 1) student successes; and 2) profiles of students, alumni, faculty and other Peralta community members. Profiles of alumni, for example, can highlight how students have prospered in careers after retooling at a Peralta College. Outstanding achievements by students and alumni, and students who have succeeded beyond expectations all should be highlighted to support excellence. Many of these stories may be suited for television or other audiovisual media.

9. Pitch topical stories: Major media should be advised by email, faxes or phone contact when faculty or other Peralta Colleges community members have a unique connection to or expertise to offer on a major topical news story (e.g., a major health crisis or Haiti earthquake).
10. Don't ignore the *Laney Tower*: The student newspaper is widely-distributed. Nothing prevents the District from pitching stories (or Op Eds) to the Tower.
11. Create a media reference guide (pilot program): Broadcast, print, wire service and online journalists have limited time available, and frequently rely on expert sources close at hand. Creation of a database of District professionals with expertise in business and academia available to respond to news media queries provides a ready means to increase awareness and favorability of Peralta Colleges. The guide would include contact information (including cell phones), bios and expertise for each faculty member listed, on a voluntary basis. To minimize staff time, we recommend that the District undertake this as a pilot program initially, featuring a limited number of departments in fields such as health care, new media and biotechnology. The program can be expanded to other educational fields depending on its initial success.
12. Use student interns to generate success stories: The colleges' journalism programs provide an available source of students who can identify, research and draft stories. They will have access to student success stories and an eye for news. Such interns must be closely supervised by District staff or PIOs, and responsibility for pitching stories will remain with professional staff.
13. Conduct outreach to Latino media: Latino students are less represented at Peralta Colleges (14%) than in the general population for a variety of

reasons. Care should be taken to ensure outreach to the ethnic press and particularly Spanish-speaking broadcast media regarding Peralta Colleges' programs. This may warrant broadcast news releases or radio news feeds in Spanish.

D. Marketing Publications/Advertising

1. Maintain excellence in publications: The District provides a wide array of publications, which generally are professional looking and effective. We have no recommendations for significant changes at the District level. However, the consistency and quality of individual College publications appear to vary.
2. Continue paper class schedules: Paper class schedules are widely used and viewed favorably according to a recent student survey (see Situation Analysis above). They are also professional looking as well as being utilitarian.
3. Advertising: While we did not review the advertising in detail, most students received mailings and reacted favorably to them.

E. Community Outreach

1. Create/coordinate a speakers bureau: The Chancellor and some college presidents already speak to civic groups and community organizations and at public forums in the six-city area, while others have expressed a willingness to do so. Regular solicitation of opportunities for key management to spread the District message should be encouraged.
2. Form a community advisory council: We recommend creation of a group of community leaders and opinion-shapers who already care about Peralta to meet regularly with the Chancellor on policy issues. This would allow the District to create a more engaged and informed group of opinion-shapers, including business and trade association executives, labor chiefs, local and state elected officials, faith community leaders, education officials, nonprofit leaders, ad agency executives, and civic organization leaders. The program would seek to communicate with these audiences frequently and systematically to understand their perspectives on key district initiatives and educate them on issues of mutual interest. Meetings would also provide a forum to test ideas and conduct community outreach, as well as a means of developing third-party allies.
3. Outreach to public officials: The District should regularly communicate with federal, state and local public officials, using email, mailings and one-

on-one meetings to communicate the District mission and achievements. In addition, public officials should be invited to relevant college events.

4. Solicit pro-bono advertising donations: Bay Area ad agencies and advertising providers (e.g., transit agencies with ad space) might be solicited to provide advertising help on a pro bono basis to enhance the District's public awareness and image.
5. Host a Jobs Summit: The U.S. economic recovery will be a major news story for some time to come. Hosting an East Bay "summit" conference to discuss job creation with local elected officials, state legislators, other political leaders, academics, finance experts, economists, corporate and small business executives, union leaders, and NGOs will draw media attention to the College District. The story is a natural one to focus on the District's role in workforce development. A "name" keynote speaker (e.g., Gov. Schwarzenegger or an Obama administration official) would be an additional media draw.
6. Encourage additional support for the alumni association: Alumni represent an underutilized resource. Database development followed by electronic outreach to alumni could increase visibility of Peralta Colleges programs, participation in events, identification of success stories, partnerships with the community, and perhaps promote Peralta Foundation donations.

V. TARGETED AUDIENCES AND MESSAGES

To be aligned with the audiences' needs, communications must be constituency-based. This implies targeted messages and communications vehicles, tailored to audience values and interests.

A. Internal Audiences

1. Faculty (including adjunct faculty) and Staff

- They are part of a high quality educational institution and are making a major contribution to its success.
- Peralta Colleges provide a caring teaching environment with opportunities for students to have close interaction with skilled, capable faculty members.
- Peralta Colleges provide life-changing opportunities for its students.
- Budget cuts are regrettable but necessary because of declining funding for the state; because of strong fiscal management practices the District has been able to cut fewer classes than most college districts statewide.
- The Peralta Community College District's leadership is doing its best to keep budget cuts as far away from the classroom as possible.
- The importance of staff operations and budgets to support quality classroom instruction. The Peralta Colleges have lean organizational support.
- What is good for the Peralta Colleges reflects well on them.
- They can help maintain Peralta's success by speaking with pride about the quality of education and impact on lives of the Peralta Colleges they serve.

2. Current Students

- The Peralta Colleges provide a caring teaching environment with opportunities for close interaction with skilled, capable faculty members that are not always available at other educational institutions.
- A Peralta education can help students succeed, whether their goal is to transfer to a four-year university, receive a vocational certificate, improve educational/vocational/life skills or simply find a better job.
- Peralta Colleges provide the most educational bang for the buck in the region, with affordable quality education, despite recent tuition increases.
- Budget cuts are regrettable but necessary because of declining funding for the state; because of strong fiscal management practices the Peralta Colleges have been able to cut fewer classes than most college districts statewide.
- The Peralta Colleges 's leadership is doing its best to keep budget cuts as far away from the classroom as possible.

- Peralta Colleges provide life-changing opportunities, including help for vocational and quality of life improvements.
- Exposure to diverse people, cultures and ideas will help prepare them for life in the global economy.
- The importance of staff operations/budgets to support quality classroom instruction.
- They can continue to connect with the Peralta Colleges for a lifetime of opportunities, including not only classes but also through the career center, Peralta Foundation and Alumni Association.

Special Communications Vehicles:

- Electronic media
- Social media, which also provides opportunities for connections via newsfeeds
- Targeted emails
- Class schedules and publications

3. Alumni and Other Past Students

- The Peralta Colleges provided them with valuable education and a lifetime of opportunities.
- What is good for the Peralta Colleges reflects well on them.
- They can reconnect with the Peralta Colleges for a lifetime of opportunities.
- They can help "pay back" others for the opportunities they received at the Peralta Colleges.

B. External Audiences

1. Taxpayers and Voters

Key Messages:

- The Peralta Colleges provides affordable quality education to local residents.
- The Peralta Colleges are essential to the life and well-being of the community and its economy.
- The Peralta Colleges are fulfilling their mission and enhancing the region's human, economic, environmental and social development.
- The Peralta Colleges provide life-changing opportunities, including the possibility for vocational and quality of life improvements.
- The Peralta Colleges are a partner with taxpayers in the region's success.
- The Peralta Colleges are a good steward of taxpayer dollars as a well-run, fiscally-responsible educational institution.

Special Communications Vehicles

- Advertising
- Direct mail
- Social media
- Peralta TV

2. Federal, State and Local Public Officials/Legislators

- The District's mission is essential to the life and well-being of their communities and their economies.
- Peralta Colleges (and community colleges in general) provide cost-effective education.
- Peralta Colleges provide affordable quality education to a large number of their constituents.
- Peralta Colleges are a partner with them in the region's success.
- The District is a good steward of taxpayer dollars as a well-run, fiscally-responsible educational institution.

Special Communications Vehicles:

- Online fact book
- Targeted emails
- Small group/one-on-one meetings, including meetings facilitated by District lobbyists and community college associations.
- Jobs Summit
- Invitations to selected Peralta Colleges events

3. Prospective Students and their Influencers

- The Peralta Colleges provide a quality education in many fields.
- Peralta Colleges provide a caring teaching environment with opportunities for close interaction with skilled, capable faculty members.
- A Peralta Colleges education can help students succeed, whether their goal is to transfer to a four-year university, receive a vocational certificate, improve educational/vocational/life skills, or simply find a better job.
- Peralta Colleges provide the most educational bang for the buck in the region, with affordable quality education, despite recent tuition increases.

Special Communications Vehicles:

- Electronic media, including social media
- Targeted emails
- Class schedules and publications
- Direct mail

4. Partners and Donors (public agency, business and community based organizations)

- The Peralta Colleges are a quality educational institution with a huge impact on the community and the regional economy.
- The District provides life-changing opportunities for its students.
- The District is capable of administering and worthy of receiving grant funds.

5. Businesses

- The Peralta Colleges are open for business, with a track record of meeting business needs for workforce training via regular classroom training and contract education.
- The Peralta Colleges provide quality education and job skills
- The Peralta Colleges provide the most educational bang for the buck in the region.

APPENDIX A: Key Principles of a Strategic Communications Plan

This strategic communications plan is based on these principles of effective communication:

- All change of opinion begins with expanding awareness.
- The best communication is two-way, involving dialogue, and a change in attitude or reinforcement of beliefs is enhanced by audience involvement.
- Much opinion is shaped by a relatively small number of opinion leaders – often those who are knowledgeable, influential and articulate.
- Opinion is shaped by many factors, including community, expertise, self-interest and saliency.
- Persuasive messages effectively communicated may:
 - 1) Change or neutralize hostile opinions,
 - 2) Crystallize latent opinions and positive attitudes, and,
 - 3) Reinforce favorable opinions and motivate pro-District supporters to positive action.
- A message is more believable if the source is credible. The District must deliver its messages honestly, clearly, and from a position of expertise. Other Third party sources of information (Alumni Association, community partners, District faculty and staff organizations, etc.) must be cultivated because they may have greater credibility with the general public and targeted audiences.
- Messages are most persuasive when they are simple, consistent and aligned with the audiences' needs, concerns, and interests. These messages must then be repeated over time using multiple means of delivery.

APPENDIX B: Additional Recommendations

The consultants recognize that many aspects of communications are largely outside the purview of the Marketing Department. Nonetheless, we have made the following observations and recommendations to improve communications and the image of the Peralta Colleges that may be the responsibility of other departments:

1. Create a Part-Time Ombudsman: The Board of Trustees should consider creation of a part-time Ombudsman. The position could be assigned as an additional duty either within the Inspector General's office or to another staff member. This position provides a means of investigating significant internal complaints and broad-based issues and attempting to resolve them before they rise to the level of major news media interest, or potentially damage the District's reputation. Minor issues (e.g., individual student complaints about class scheduling) and those which can best be resolved through established grievance procedures would be excluded from the Ombudsman's duties, or directed to those who can best provide assistance.
2. Adopt best practices on ethics: The District has recently updated its ethics policies in several areas. It may wish to review best practices on policies such as financial conflicts of interest, transparency and expense reporting; it may also consider conducting an ethics review. Such reviews may be conducted on a regular basis in future, perhaps biennially. This may assist in reducing potential exposure to negative media coverage and damage to the District's reputation.
3. Revise the District website: The Peralta Colleges have a utilitarian but somewhat dated website (www.peralta.cc.ca.us), which just under half (49%) of students rate as outstanding or good. The current focus is on enrollment, administration (Passport), class schedules, and event calendars. The most visible portions of the website are largely devoid of messaging designed to shape opinion and motivate positive behavior, and generally lack emotionally-persuasive content. While the consultants realize that the website is not under the control of the Marketing Department and is currently under development, we recommend the following changes be considered:
 - a. Link the home page to a "Who We Are" page with the District's mission statement and vision.
 - b. Simplify the home page, with fewer links. Links on the home page should be combined. For example, a single link can connect all functions related to enrollment, admissions and registration to improve navigability.
 - c. Use more emotional content throughout the webpage, including photos showing intense personal interactions. Additional photos should also be featured throughout the website that show students interacting with faculty, and conducting research and training (vocational certification

- programs are particularly camera-friendly). Additional photos and audio-visual content can be added gradually as they become available.
- d. Clearly identify each College's home page with the District. A tagline that simply states: "Berkeley City College: a Peralta College" would do the trick.
 - e. Highlight programs that ought to receive additional priority by placing them on the home page. For example, if workforce development is important and contract or fee-based classes generate revenue for the District, a "Businesses" link ought to receive home page attention. At the same time, H1N1 flu alerts and the like should be transferred to a less prominent page over time.
 - f. Encourage greater consistency between the websites of all colleges. Because many students attend classes at two or more colleges, they should expect websites with a similar format where possible.
 - g. Improve website materials for international students. As the District works to attract international students who generate more revenue for classroom programs, foreign language information posted on the website needs to be improved, with particular attention to improved graphics (current information online contains no graphics). For example, the District has an impressive brochure that could be posted on the website as an e-brochure in several languages. Given the Bay Area's importance as a port of entry for Asia, it is particularly useful to post for admissions information in a readable format in Chinese and other major Asian languages, as is done for other West Coast colleges (see for example: <http://www.i-studentadvisor.com/grcc/welcome/>).
4. Send email to K-12 referrers regularly: Overall, the Peralta Colleges appear to work fairly well with high school counselors. However, it may consider sending email of the fact book, website announcements, registration and other relevant information to counselors and other referrers (e.g., high school principals, teachers and site administrators, UC and CSU admissions offices). This might help improve the perception among potential students that Peralta Colleges are a valid choice, not a consolation prize. (Note that the Marketing Department does not have primary responsibility for communications with K-12 schools.)

APPENDIX C: Initial Story Ideas

1. Economic Recovery and Job Creation:

- Peralta graduates are winning jobs in a tough economy in industries where qualified skilled employees are in high demand (e.g., nursing).
- The Next Big Thing: Training for green jobs at Peralta Colleges.
- Cutting edge training in bio tech is available at Peralta.
- Success Stories at Highland Hospital: Graduates from Peralta keep us healthy, dominate medical technician professions at local hospital.

2. Peralta's Air Force:

- Students in aviation maintenance courses at College of Alameda utilize a 737 airliner and Navy jet.

3. Changing face of education:

- The trend for more 4-year college students to attend community college first is evident at Peralta.

4. Those Who Do, Teach at Peralta:

- Experienced professionals pass on their skills by teaching at Peralta.

5. Providing Dental Services for Low-Income Youths:

- Peralta dental assistant training program provides services to the poor. (This story might be pitched to ethnic media, including Sing Tao and other Chinese language newspapers and TV news, since the program collaborates with a clinic providing services to Asian-Americans).

6. Enrollment Soars at Peralta Colleges:

- More students are enrolling at Peralta to increase their skills in the face of the recession. The story could expand to show how Peralta is dealing with increased demand despite tough budgets with bigger classes, budget cuts far from the classroom, fewer classes cut than in other institutions.

APPENDIX D: Qualitative Opinion Research

In-depth Interviews (by phone or in person):

1. Bill Withrow, Peralta Community College District Board of Trustees
2. Herb Kitchen, District Dept of Marketing
3. Daewon King, student
4. Yvonne Thompson, Berkeley City College student, Student Trustee
5. Phil Magro, Oakland Tech HS Counselor
6. Eliza Chan, PIO, Laney College
7. Dr. Elnora Tena Webb, President, Laney College
8. Dr. George Herring, President, College of Alameda (also in group meeting)
9. Scott Albright, faculty, Diesel Mechanics, College of Alameda

Small Group Meeting:

1. Shirley Fogarino, Public Information Officer, Berkeley City College *
2. Shirleen Schermerhorn, PIO, College of Alameda.
3. Jim Stein, Peralta TV Electronic Technician.
4. Suzanne Cancilla-Fox, District Marketing/Peralta TV Web Content Developer.
5. Michelle Lee, Peralta TV Program Coordinator.
6. Cecilia Vasquez, Peralta TV Producer (temporary).
7. Rona Young, PIO, Merritt College;
8. Chris Gatmaitan, Graphic Designer, Peralta Marketing dept.
9. Jay Calhoun, Producer, Peralta TV
10. Taylor Wansley, Producer, Peralta TV
11. Alton Jelks, Special Assistant to Chancellor Elihu Harris
12. Tom Smith, Vice Chancellor for Budget and Finance

* She also responded by telephone to follow-up questions and forwarded BCC background materials.

** Jeff Heyman, Executive Director of Marketing and Senior Secretary Didi Fitzgerald of the department also attended the small group meeting.