

Howard University

Synopsis

Howard University is a private, non-sectarian university in Washington, D.C., founded in 1867 to provide educational opportunities to qualified people who were denied acceptance at many universities of that time, including women and African-Americans. Today, Howard is widely considered to be one of the most prestigious historically black institutions of higher education in the world. It offers, in addition to undergraduate studies, graduate programs in business, law, pharmacy, social work, medicine, dentistry, and divinity.

In 2013, Howard enlisted the Channel team to evaluate its positioning and brand strategy, and offer recommendations for further strengthening its standing as a leading research institution and university of choice for highly qualified students. TDC conducted an extensive series of interviews and focus groups with administrators, faculty, deans, alumni, donors, current and past presidents, and students to gather information and insights.

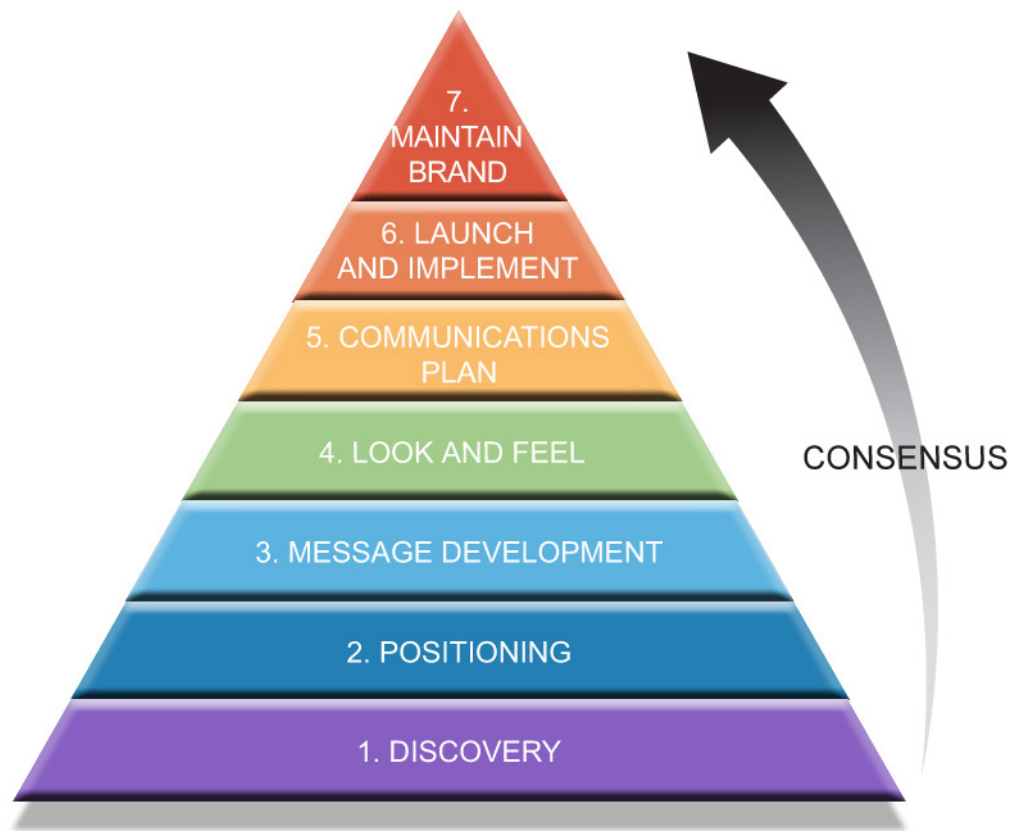
In addition, Channel performed a communications audit to assess the effectiveness of Howard's current marketing materials, as well as a brand benchmarking study to understand how Howard's peer and competitive institutions market themselves. The body of knowledge gathered was then applied by Channel to establish a new brand positioning, messaging platform, and look and feel for Howard's brand strategy going forward.

Our Process

We applied our Channel BrandBuilder™ methodology for developing recommendations on repositioning and re-energizing the Howard University brand. It enabled us to discover Howard's unique attributes and gain insights into Howard's brand equity, culture, and values. It was also applied to synthesize those key findings into a brand promise and positioning, develop a consistent and clear messaging platform, and establish a branding theme.

Results

Our findings and recommendations were well-received by stakeholders at Howard. We have prepared recommendations for the next phases of the new brand implementation. Our next objective will be to build and elevate consensus of the Howard brand internally with faculty and staff, and externally in the minds of prospective students, parents, guidance counselors, alumni, and the broader Howard community.

**Channel BrandBuilder™**

Channel BrandBuilder™ is our proprietary approach for building an organization's brand, re-energizing a brand, or developing a major campaign. It's a flexible, seven-step process. The discovery phase is the foundation of our process with modes of discovery that include internal and external surveys, focus groups, interviews with key stakeholders, interviews with external audiences, competitive brand benchmarking research, an audit of existing communications, and ethnographic research.

howard questionnaire:
stakeholders

Positioning and Branding

Current brand equity —

In your own words, what is the

What are your audiences' perc

What do you think are the big

Category analysis —

Who do you consider to be your primary competitors?


Where is Howard's place in the competitive landscape?

What do you think makes Howard different from its competitors?

How much impact do you think U.S. News & World Report Rankings have on prospective students' decision to attend Howard?

What unique qualities, if any, do you think Howard conveys to its students?

howard focus group:
students



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Positioning and Branding

1. Introductions and Warm Up

Self-Introduction

Please tell us:

- your year of study (freshman/sophomore, etc. / graduate student)
- school or department in which you are enrolled
- major or planned major

2. The University Brand

Audience understanding —

What are your career goals?

Did you choose Howard specifically because it could help you achieve these goals OR did you choose Howard for other reasons (ex.

What information source(s) influenced Howard mailings/comm. pieces, etc.)?

www.thedesignchannel.com

howard questionnaire:
alumni

Positioning and Branding

Personality traits —

How would you describe Howard

What character/personality traits

Would you like to see more of students/faculty) OR do you prefer

What values/qualities are most important to you?

If Howard University were a car, what would it be? Why?

What other product/service brands do you like? Why?

Goals for the future —

What are Howard's greatest strengths?

What are Howard's greatest weaknesses?


What are the biggest issues facing Howard University today?

If you were the Howard president, how would you want Howard to be perceived IN GENERAL moving forward?

How would you want Howard to be perceived AS AN HBCU moving forward?

What do you think the future holds for HBCUs?

howard focus group:
faculty



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Positioning and Branding

3. Brand Meaning/Consensus Building:

In general, what does a brand mean to you?

What do you think are the main factors in the formation of a brand?

What do you think are the benefits to an organization in having a clear, cohesive brand?

Do you think the school's current brand is well understood by the faculty?

What do you think are the barriers that stand in the way of building a strong brand identity?

How can these barriers be overcome?

What communications channels do you use to get news/information about Howard (ex. — Facebook, Twitter, campus newspaper, etc.)?

What is the single most important message about Howard University that needs to be conveyed to all audiences?

Interviews and Focus Groups Questionnaire

Gathering insights and perceptions of audiences and stakeholders is a critical step in developing a brand's foundation. We conducted phone and in-person interviews, as well as focus groups, with many representatives of the Howard University community, from students and faculty to alumni and donors, and even current and past presidents.

Our Brand Benchmarking study evaluated the online and printed marketing materials of 34 universities identified as Howard's peer and competitive institutions. It examined the positioning, key messaging, and brand look and feel of institutions across the country, including historically black colleges and universities, large public universities, prestigious private institutions, as well as universities in the metro Washington, DC area.

Howard University

EXISTING COMMUNICATIONS BRAND AUDIT

May 2014

Brand Audit

Howard University's visual and verbal communications material is the expression of the institution's philosophy and culture, as well as its abilities and goals. The material can announce or mumble, inform or confuse, delight or dishearten, stimulate or irritate, and make or break a connection. It is therefore important for Howard to plan and manage its communications carefully.

Executive Summary

Within the last few years, Howard developed a brand standards guide. The branding guide presents clear documentation and application of the basic elements within the Howard University branding system (i.e. logo, color palette, typography, etc.). The document is well-written and designed. The guide sets high standards for Howard University brand consistency and the institution's culture and philosophy.

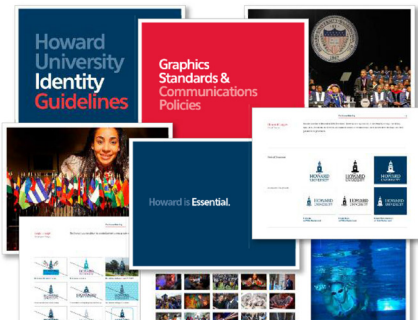
The guide was developed because of major gaps in the University's identity implementation. Two major problems were identified at the time—lack of sophistication and inconsistency. As stated then: "Both of these result in the depletion of the meaning and value of the brand. Inconsistency also introduces irregularities that impede brand recognition and obstruct positive associations with the brand."

Some Observations
Except for a somewhat more consistent use of the Howard logos and colors, we have to say, those same two major problems still exist—lack of sophistication and inconsistency in the visual communication aspects. The written communication aspects were, for the most part, well-aligned with Howard's mission and high-level messaging.

The notes on the following pages reiterate these observations. Almost all the communication pieces from the professional schools were generic-looking and lacked a clear connection to an overall umbrella brand. Here are some highlights from the observations:

- There was not a consistent manner for a professional school's name to be "hooked up" or visually aligned with the Howard logo to form a system of unit identification (even though this is addressed in the Howard Identity standards).
- At a very basic level, some pieces do not incorporate the Howard logo, colors, or typography from the identity standards.
- Even when the Howard logo and colors were used, there was still no familial connection or coherence between many communication pieces and the Howard brand.
- The vast majority of the professional schools' materials are generic and do not differentiate Howard from other professional schools.
- Many high-level pieces look and feel uninspiring. These materials present an opportunity to communicate with and touch various audiences. They should be designed to present Howard in a unique, impactful, and dynamic manner.

Existing Communications: Brand Standards



Brand Standards
The Howard Brand Standards guide presents clear documentation of applying the basic elements within the Howard University branding system. We recommend greater adherence to the direction provided in this guide.

Existing Communications: Publications



University Publications
Both of these publications are modern, well-designed, and professionally produced. They incorporate great photography, imagery, and messaging. They incorporate the basic elements of the Howard brand identity. But there is still room for improvement to maximize the impact on your most important audiences.

Existing Communications: Professional School Material



College of Arts and Sciences

Cards promoting plays and theater events have been created, attractive designs. The Howard identity could be target to ensure universes under that these events are university productions.

School of Communications

The recruitment package for the School of Communications is professionally designed and provided other pieces reviewed are less impressive in comparison.

Communications Audit

To get a better understanding of the manner in which Howard had engaged its audiences to date, we conducted an audit of much of its available marketing materials. We examined messaging, brand consistency, adherence to brand standards, use and quality of images, and many other aspects of the materials in order make informed recommendations going forward.

Key Findings

Key Findings

- Howard faces an array of challenges that hinder its development, operational efficiency, engagement with critical audiences, and attractiveness to prospective students. While not inherently factors in Howard's branding efforts, they may point to opportunities for additional communications efforts. They include:
 - Dysfunctional administrative processes
 - Lack of stable leadership at the highest levels
 - Disenfranchised alumni who are not invited to share their resources with the university in a meaningful or organized manner
 - Poor communications between administration and students/faculty
 - Weak athletic programs—a major missed opportunity to boost fundraising and increase interest from prospective students
 - Outdated facilities and technology

Key Findings

- Howard's proud past is not the whole story**
Howard has been defined by its legacy of distinguished alumni from past generations. While impressive, the past is becoming less relevant in today's world. The fact of the matter is that Howard's notable recent alumni, current achievements and important research can connect the past with the future to give Howard a more relevant, contemporary face.
- There is only one Howard**
There is no other institution of higher learning today comparable to Howard. It is irreplaceable as a national university that has international influence; rigorous academic programs, wide renown for serving the underserved; broad afro-centric diversity; and a nurturing, protective environment. Howard is an iconic, one-of-a-kind institution.

Key Findings

- Howard transcends the HBCU label**
Howard is widely regarded as the Mecca—the leading HBCU and center of black academia in the world. While the HBCU standing is an important part of Howard's identity, other attributes such as its professional programs, international reputation, and research focus make Howard especially unique.
- Howard prepares students to change the world**
The university has played an integral role in educating many innovators and trailblazers in recent history. Today it continues to provide an experience that prepares students to create a career and life of meaningfulness, achievement, and service to others.

Key Findings

- Howard attracts purposeful individuals**
Howard's Washington, DC location and service-driven mission attract students and faculty around the world who want engagement in national and global issues—in particular, those addressing social inequalities.
- Howard offers a transformational experience**
Howard offers a comprehensive breadth of academic and professional programs that prepares students for career success, teaches them to overcome barriers, and reinforces their desire to impact society in a positive way.

70

68

Key Findings

After analyzing the information gathered from our interviews and focus groups, we identified major takeaways that revealed the most compelling perceptions and truths about the Howard experience.

All about a transformational experience

Howard University is the nation's leading HBCU and foremost center of black academia in the world. Its Washington, D.C. location, comprehensive academic programs and service-driven mission prepare students to succeed in their careers, overcome barriers and change the world in a positive way. The university's legacy of distinguished alumni, combined with its accomplished faculty, current achievements and research focus, propels Howard forward.

Positioning Statement

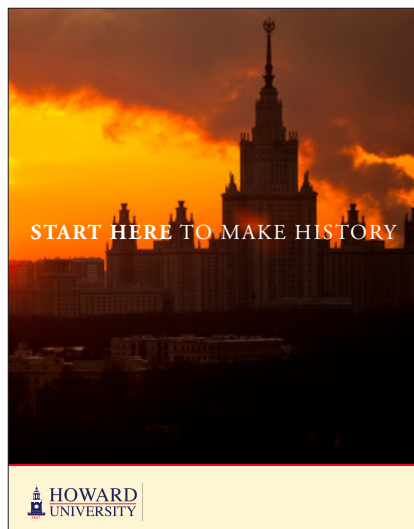
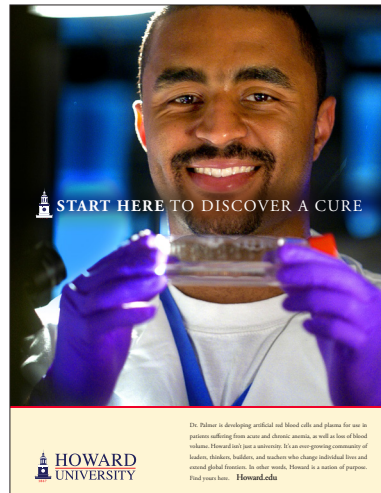
Our key findings led us to a positioning statement for Howard that defined its competitive arena, its audience, its points of differentiation, and ultimately, its unique selling proposition (USP).

Howard University | “One Voice” Message Platform

Our Brand Promise (Positioning Statement)	All about a transformational experience Howard University is the nation's leading HBCU and foremost center of black academia in the world. Its Washington, D.C. location, comprehensive academic programs and service-driven mission prepare students to succeed in their careers, overcome barriers and change the world in a positive way. The university's legacy of distinguished alumni, combined with its accomplished faculty, current achievements and research focus, propels Howard forward.				
Theme	Start here to make history.				
What Howard Stands for (Signature theme or tagline)	TBD				
Our Character (Brand attributes expressed in human characteristics and personality traits)	Afro-centric We provide an educational environment that attracts black and minority students worldwide and brings black points of view to the forefront of academic programs.	Encouraging We actively promote and provide opportunities for student leadership and involvement in a wide range of activities and capacities.	Supportive Students receive support and nurturing from faculty and staff to succeed in their academic pursuits and personal lives.	Proud We hold our bond with the university in high esteem, and honor the alumni, achievements, and milestones associated with Howard.	Challenging We expect achievement and effort from students and believe that the struggle to reach academic goals develops greater resolve to attain professional and career success.
Core Values (Fundamental principles and beliefs that drive our actions)	Academic Excellence We provide a first-class, rigorous education that provides graduates with the knowledge and skills to succeed in the field of their choice.	Social Mission / Activism Students, faculty and alumni embrace the expectation that their association with Howard carries a responsibility to address social disparities and serve the greater good.	Diversity / Inclusivity We welcome qualified students across the country and around the world who bring a broad spectrum of backgrounds, experiences, talents and potential.	Global Outlook Our graduates are engaged in leading conversations about, and developing solutions to, global issues.	Research We are committed to advancing the frontiers of knowledge and expanding our thought leadership in many disciplines.
Our Differentiators (Qualities that are credible, ownable, unique and telegraphic)	Legacy / Heritage We have a long history of producing graduates who have changed the course of, or sparked innovations in, a wide range of fields.	Location Our Washington, DC setting provides access to many career opportunities, direct involvement in national and global affairs, and exposure to vibrant cultural experiences.	Professional Programs We offer far more professional programs (13) than any other HBCU and many other institutions of higher learning.	International Renown We are admired and acclaimed around the world for the quality of our education and the achievements of our alumni.	HBCU We are among 103 institutions of higher learning in the U.S. that have historically emphasized educational opportunities for black and minority students.
Benefits to Students (Aspirations and anticipated rewards)	Preparation Our remarkable faculty equips students with the knowledge, confidence and values they need to succeed in their careers and impact the world in positive, meaningful ways.	Transformational Experience We provide an educational experience and environment that provides fertile ground for life-changing ideas, values and points of view.	Howard Name / Prestige Our name instantly conveys credibility and excellence, and can help open doors to professional opportunities and options.	Perspective We offer an experience that leaves graduates with a deep understanding and appreciation of the culture, issues and viewpoints of the African Diaspora.	Alumni Network The relationships formed at Howard provide an extensive, life-long network that supports career advancement, professional success and personal connections.
Our Vision	Through its programs of exemplary quality, Howard University will be the first HBCU to become a top-50 research university, while it continues its traditions of leadership and service to underserved communities nationally and abroad.				
Our Mission	Howard University, a culturally diverse, comprehensive, research-intensive and historically Black private university, provides an educational experience of exceptional quality and the undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels to students of high academic standing and potential, with particular emphasis upon educational opportunities for Black students.				

Message Platform

Our Message Platform mapped out important qualities of Howard that helped inform our Positioning Statement. It identified elements that illustrate Howard's character, core values, differentiators, and benefits, and provided a reference tool for shaping Howard's messaging in the future.



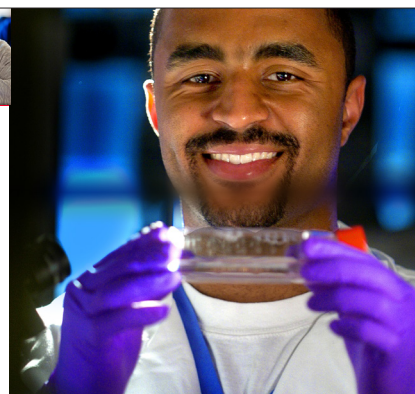
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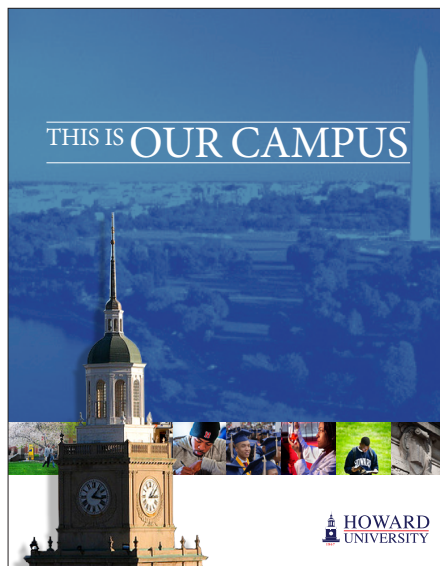
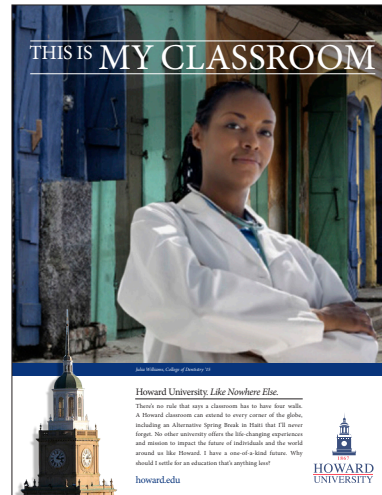
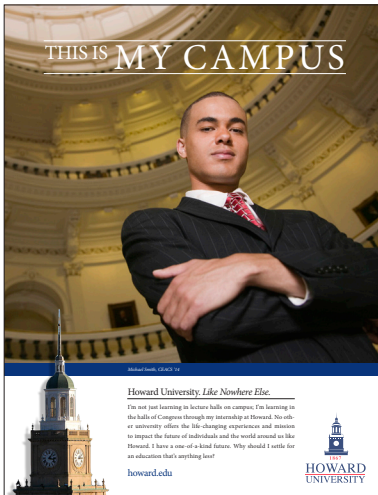


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Creative Concept: "Start Here"

One of the concepts we developed was based on Howard's illustrious history of producing trailblazers and pioneers in many fields. The "Start Here" message invited prospective students to continue the tradition of breaking new ground and changing the world at Howard as well.



KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION

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HOWARD BY THE NUMBERS

100,000+

Book collection at the Moorland-Spangman Research Center, one of the richest sources of materials on Blacks in the world.



Creative Concept: "Like Nowhere Else"

This concept highlighted the unique learning opportunities and environments that Howard University provides its students. Its "classrooms" and academic experiences range far beyond the Howard campus and often include the halls of government as well as communities in countries around the world.