

Observations & Recommendations from the Wichita State University Research

February 9th 2010

1. Consistent perceptions of Wichita State University in the Wichita market:

- When respondents were asked which Kansas based college or university they would recommend for specific degree programs, the percentage recommending Wichita State remained basically the same for *best overall academic program, best overall faculty, best engineering school, best school for health professionals other than physicians, best fine arts school, best liberal arts and sciences school, best business school, best education and teacher training school and best general college degree*. The only variable on which there was a statistically significant change was *best value for the money*, where 6% fewer respondents indicated Wichita State. (WSU declined from 34% of the responses to 28%.)
- Regarding *best value for the money*, Wichita State's decline is matched by a similar gain in the percentage naming Butler County Community College.
- Kansas State experienced significant declines in the percentage of respondents naming them in *best overall faculty, best liberal arts and sciences school* and *best overall college degree*.
- The University of Kansas experienced significant increases in the percentage of respondents naming them in *best overall academic program, best school for health professionals other than physicians* and *best general college degree*.
- Wichita State received the highest percentage of responses of all specific schools named in the areas of *best overall faculty, best value for the money, best engineering school, best fine arts school, best liberal arts and sciences school, best business school* and *best general college degree*.
- The highest percentage of respondents recommending a specific college on the 2009 survey was the 42% who would recommend WSU's Barton School of Business.
- Approximately 25% of the respondents indicate that they "don't know" which college is best in all of the categories covered in this question.

- What the results of this question suggest is that Wichita State is “holding on to its own” in this time of intensified competition in the market for higher education. As was indicated in the 2007 results, it is our perception that the cumulative effect of WSU’s institutional advertising over the past decade continues to “bear fruit” and that within budgetary limitations this institutional campaign should be continued. The high percentage of “don’t know” answers also indicates that there is room for WSU to enhance the perceptions held of aspects of the University through selective promotional activities.

2. The continued importance of “work based learning” in the selection criteria for a school: Better than 90% of the 2009 respondents to the survey indicated that this was an “important” criterion in the selection of a college or university. This continues a trend seen in the 2007 survey results regarding the importance of the availability of such learning opportunities. This outcome is not unexpected given the existing economic situation, which has probably enhanced the perceived desirability of these types of educational offerings. Since among the Regent’s schools, Wichita State is uniquely qualified to provide this type of learning, it seems prudent to continue to find ways to highlight this availability to potential students.

3. In recruitment advertising, focus on student accomplishments: After the availability of work based learning, the selection characteristic for a university that received the most “important” evaluations was “**the accomplishments of students.**” What this may suggest is that a promotional campaign focusing on the accomplishments of recent WSU graduates would be valuable in the recruiting process.

4. As in 2007, respondents in the Wichita market have an overwhelmingly positive top of mind recall regarding Wichita State: In the 2009 responses there were relatively few negative comments made regarding WSU. Among the aspects of the University that received the most positive top of mind comments are: (respondents were asked to exclude athletic programs from their answer)

- The Business school
- The Engineering school
- Comments about other programs that WSU offers, such as dental hygiene, music and dance
- Aeronautical engineering

5. The importance of pride: Pride is an issue that resonates emotionally with many people. They naturally want to be proud of things that they associate with or belong to. Dealing with pride in Wichita as a city, as well as pride in Wichita State, the 2009 survey utilized a pride scale, ranging from 1 to 100, with 100 being the highest level of pride available.

- **Pride in Wichita as a community:** Given some pre-conceived notions of the level of pride that Wichita residents feel for their community, it was gratifying that respondents to the survey awarded an average “pride score” to the community of 72. The most frequently awarded “pride score” for the community was 80. These results are validated by the responses to another survey question, which asked how well the phrase “a city to be proud of” described Wichita. Seventy seven percent of the respondents indicated that this phrase described Wichita well.
- **Pride in Wichita State:** Both focus group participants as well as survey respondents gave Wichita State positive evaluations regarding the level of pride that they felt in the institution. The average pride score given by survey respondents was a 74, with the most frequently awarded pride score being 80. Respondents whose responses reflected pride in the University indicated that this pride was based on the perception that Wichita State is “a good school,” other reasons for positive pride evaluations included personal experiences at WSU, as well as the accomplishments of sports teams.

The level of pride felt towards the University, as well as the City could be a successful promotional platform for some of the University’s (as well as the city’s) public relations or advertising programs.

6. Recall of Wichita State University advertising: As in the 2007 responses, Wichita State advertising enjoyed a high level of unaided advertising recall. The most frequently recalled advertising campaign featured WuShock in various career positions throughout the Wichita community. This work based advertising platform is particularly topical given the importance of work based learning and the success of students in the selection of a promotional campaign.

7. The impact of Wichita State on the economy of Wichita and the region: Although it might be assumed that Wichita State would be perceived as a significant contributor to the local economy, it is gratifying to see that many respondents to the telephonic survey, as well as participants in the focus groups, perceived such an impact. Providing an educated work force, the role of the University itself as an employer, as well as the economic stimulus provided by the students who come to Wichita to attend school were all mentioned as ways that the University contributed to the economy of the area. This perceived level of economic impact could be more clearly communicated to members of the Wichita community.

8. The impact of Wichita State on the city of Wichita culturally: Participants in the focus groups, as well as respondents to the survey were both unsure of how to answer this question. Although some mentioned the musical events, art exhibits and theater performances sponsored by the University, many seemed unaware of this aspect of Wichita State's role in the Wichita community. If the University desires higher levels of awareness of these programs, a specifically developed program to attract broader attention to them may be in order.

9. Publicizing the results of this survey: The results of both the focus groups and the telephonic survey are, once again, quite positive. Given concerns about further reductions in state support for higher education in general, and Wichita State specifically, these results might become part of a "point paper" regarding the positive impact of the University on Wichita and the State. Although it is beyond our scope of responsibility to recommend how best to make these results more widely known in the community and the area, this certainly seems to be a laudable effort for the administration of the University to consider.