Current Situation

The University of North Dakota (UND), founded in 1883, is a public research university and the flagship university for the state of North Dakota. However, despite this status and the university’s rich history, the UND brand has stagnated. Without a unified brand promise, and as the result of a fragmented approach to marketing, UND has lost ground on its competitors, both within the state of North Dakota and across the wider region.
Why Brand Matters /
The Project

Under the vision of President Mark Kennedy, and to proactively overcome its challenges, UND has embarked on a process to create a new and differentiating brand promise that will elevate UND’s position as the premier higher education institution within the Northern Plains region.

To achieve this overall strategic goal, SME will deliver on the following key project objectives:

1. Understand university leadership’s vision for the UND brand and how it relates to the institution’s strategic plan.

2. Execute a comprehensive mixed method research plan to identify the unique, differentiating and brand-building attributes that UND will utilize to build its brand for the future.

3. Examine the UND brand through the lens of its closest and most important stakeholders, including: current students, prospective students, alumni, faculty, staff and Grand Forks/North Dakota residents.

4. Establish an organic and differentiated market positioning/promise that will distinguish the UND brand (both regionally and nationally) and unite all stakeholders behind a single/unified brand vision.

5. Develop a comprehensive messaging program to enliven the new brand promise and connect with each individual stakeholder group in a motivating and relevant manner.
Research Participants & Methodology

Throughout the research process, SME engaged a wide range of stakeholders regarding the UND brand, including:

1. University Leadership
2. Faculty
3. Staff
4. Current Undergraduate Students
5. Current Graduate Students
6. Parents of Current Students
7. Prospective Students
8. Alumni
9. Grand Forks and North Dakota Residents

Stakeholders were engaged through the following methods:

- Online Brand Health Survey - 4,619 Responses
- Leadership In-Depth Interviews - 19 IDI's Conducted
- Key Stakeholder Focus Groups - 9 Groups Conducted
Brand Audit: Brand Identity

UND's Brand Standards were established to present a unified identity across the university's various departments. These guidelines, however, were not enforced, allowing each department to create and apply their own fonts, logos and legacy marks.

The addition of these identity elements has diluted the visual representation of the wider institution.
Brand Audit: Brand Identity

UND must revise and subsequently enforce its Brand Standards to structure the presentation of its sub-brands in a manner that is consistent and directly tied to the wider university brand.
Peer Competitor Group:

Peer competitors are widely clustered around the same positioning, where regional landscape and research is juxtaposed with an inspirational, albeit "fluffy" message of "exploration" or "discovery."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Positioning</th>
<th>Emphasis</th>
<th>Tagline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of North Dakota (UND)</td>
<td>Think exceptional, discover your passion</td>
<td>Building a legacy</td>
<td>Your Legacy Begins Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Nebraska</td>
<td>Provide leadership for Nebraska; a catalyst for a better future</td>
<td>Undergraduate education and research</td>
<td>Pioneering New Frontiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of South Dakota</td>
<td>The &quot;Perfect Fit&quot; and a smart educational investment</td>
<td>Affordability and convenience</td>
<td>Quality. Flexibility. Affordability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Montana</td>
<td>Thrive in life</td>
<td>University Growth</td>
<td>The Discovery Continues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Idaho</td>
<td>Explore, aspire and excel</td>
<td>Discovery, opportunity and self-improvement</td>
<td>From Here, You Can Go Anywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Minnesota</td>
<td>Changing lives through research, education and outreach; Minnesota's flagship university</td>
<td>Liberal arts, self-discovery and exploration</td>
<td>Driven to Discover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University of Iowa</td>
<td>Find your path and make an impact on the state</td>
<td>Discovery; whatever your passion is, you can find it at Iowa</td>
<td>For Iowa, Forever More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Wyoming</td>
<td>The place to discover your passion and adventure</td>
<td>Discovery, self-improvement and personal adventure</td>
<td>Start Yours.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Core Competitor Group:
Core competitors are widely positioned as affordable and practical options, particularly for students seeking a career-based education; however, many of these institutions fail to deliver a brand promise that extends beyond a functional delivery.

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<tr>
<th>School</th>
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<th>Tagline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UND</td>
<td>Think exceptional, discover your passion</td>
<td>Building a legacy</td>
<td>Your Legacy Begins Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMD</td>
<td><em>Those Who Can,</em> inspirational, small campus, but a big degree</td>
<td>Discovery and opportunity</td>
<td>Driven to Discover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordia College</td>
<td>Influence the affairs of the world; dedicated to the Christian life</td>
<td>Liberal arts with a global mindset</td>
<td>God's plans endure. His purpose lasts forever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of St Thomas</td>
<td>Educating leaders of faith &amp; character</td>
<td>Career-focused education; part time/flex MBA program</td>
<td>All for the common good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota State University</td>
<td>Big thinking and research can change the world</td>
<td>Convenience, accessibility</td>
<td>Big ideas. Real-world thinking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moorhead</td>
<td>A real-world education that fosters personal growth and professional success</td>
<td>A smart investment, delivering exceptional, real-world value</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bemidji State University</td>
<td>Highly affordable in-state education for North Dakotans</td>
<td>Affordability, impacting the state</td>
<td>The Lake, The Learning, The Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Cloud State University</td>
<td>The leading teachers' college in quantity and quality of educators, particularly K-12</td>
<td>Professional studies</td>
<td>What's Your World</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Core Competitor Group:

North Dakota State—UND's primary competitor—is an interesting outlier, as it positions its brand around a distinct culture and sense of authenticity. North Dakota State—through the "#NDSUTRUE" campaign—cultivates an image of the "every man," which positions the brand as approachable and relatable.

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<th>School</th>
<th>Positioning</th>
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<th>Tagline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UND</td>
<td>Think exceptional, discover your passion</td>
<td>Building a legacy</td>
<td>Your Legacy Begins Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDSU</td>
<td>Student-focused, land-grant research institution.</td>
<td>Research, affordability</td>
<td>#NDSUTrue</td>
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</table>
The University of North Dakota—largely as a result of budget cuts and the stigmas associated with the drawn-out athletics name change—has lost control of its narrative.

“We let the bad press and media dictate who we are. Coming up with a new name was a really long and painful process for a lot of us and I think it held us back for a long time.” (Faculty Member)

“The name change fiasco really hurt us because that’s how the outside world views us—we’re the school who had the offensive name and we’re still struggling with that. And now the narrative we’re facing is all about the budget cuts and the financial problems. It’s just one thing after another and we haven’t been able to get ahead.” (Alumni)
Insight

The University of North Dakota must retake control of its story by building a brand that is firmly rooted in UND's distinct values, culture and personality. The brand must declaratively state these elements to galvanize the campus community and unify all prospective marketing decisions and engagement efforts.
Stakeholders and the wider public struggle with pinpointing the overarching theme regarding what makes UND special.

"How do we distinguish the institution from the 4,000 approximately institutions of higher education in the country? That's the question and I think the majority of us struggle in identifying those characteristics." (University Leadership)

"I was in a car with 3 students today traveling to the state capital, and at one point, I turned to them and asked what the University of North Dakota stands for and what it means to attend the school. None of them could answer those questions and that's a huge problem." (University Leadership)
When you think of the University of North Dakota, what comes to mind?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Students (Undergraduate + Graduate)</th>
<th>UND Alumni</th>
<th>Prospective Students</th>
<th>Faculty/Staff</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top Word/Phrase</td>
<td>Hockey</td>
<td>Hockey</td>
<td>Hockey</td>
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<tr>
<td>#2 Word/Phrase</td>
<td>Fighting Sioux</td>
<td>Fighting Sioux</td>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td>#3 Word/Phase</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Aviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>#4 Word/Phrase</td>
<td>Aviation</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 Word/Phase</td>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Cold</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample (n) = 978

Sample (n) = 560

Sample (n) = 1078

Sample (n) = 684

Brand Health Survey Q2; Sample (n) = 4310

- 29.28% were uncategorized or nonspecific
- Categories with under 1% each:
  - Liberal Arts
  - Law School
  - Business School
  - Research
  - Fighting Hawks
The University brand must transcend a generic tagline or statement by adopting a brand that unifies and becomes ingrained in the school's culture. The new brand must be distinct to UND to the point that it lives in the hearts and minds of North Dakotans and everyone associated with the university.
The majority of UND's stakeholders do not understand the meanings associated with the university's academic and athletic logos.

"You can ask every student on campus what the flame means and 99% will have no idea. They know a flame exists on the quad, but there’s no connection to it. It doesn’t mean anything to them. And now we have the Fighting Hawks logo, what does that mean? What is a Fighting Hawk and how do we represent that logo?" (Faculty Member)

"The athletics and university identities and brands must be intertwined to tell our story and to help with the transition from the Sioux name. The Sioux name had a distinct identity and personality that is lost now, so now’s the time to build the university brand and the athletics brand simultaneously." (Alumni)
What are UND’s Official Colors?

When asked to list UND's official colors, many respondents were either confused or mistakenly named a color from the Athletics identity.

Brand Health Survey Q63; Sample (n) = 3612
Insight

The University of North Dakota—to strengthen the equity of the academic logo and to ease the transition from the Fighting Sioux identity—must harmonize its institutional and athletic brands. UND must bridge the two identities by leveraging and communicating attributes that are inherent to both the university and its athletic programs.
The Challenge Within: North Dakotans hold an unfavorable view of UND relative to stakeholders living outside the state. Moreover, perception is also limited relative to NDSU in rural and Western areas of North Dakota.

"It's funny, because of the budget cuts and the negativity that surrounds campus, we're actually perceived as a stronger institution by people living outside the state." (Faculty Member)

"I think NDSU has a bit of an advantage over us in terms of connecting to some of the smaller out West. They are the agricultural school and the land grant college. They’ve spent a lot of time and money connecting with those people and working with farmers and research and helping them, and so I think they have that sort of natural connection to the rural parts of the state." (University Leadership)
Insight

In-state perception has suffered, in a broad sense, because of the negative press and culture deriving from UND's fiscal challenges. However, the diminished sentiment out West can be attributed to a number of specific factors, including NDSU's success in football and its ability to personally connect with rural residents by positioning their brand as the approachable "every man."
The University of North Dakota's academic reputation is driven largely by the institution's strong/key programs, including aviation, law, medical, engineering etc.

"When you think of UND, you think of our engineering and aviation schools; those are some top-ranked programs that really separate us from other universities, not only in the region, but in the country."
(Graduate Student)

"If you asked 10 people in the state what they think of us, the majority of them would talk about our aviation program or our law school or some of our other strong programs. That's great and all, but being known for specific schools or programs creates a one-up mentality around campus. It divides us more than it unites us."
(University Leadership)
Insight

Leveraging the strong reputation of UND's premier academic programs is a means to raise awareness; however, the overarching brand story should not directly highlight specific offerings. Doing so would further disenfranchise the university and perpetuate convoluted brand messaging.
Communicating the value of a liberal arts education has been a challenge for the University, particularly to current students, who view the education as a means to fulfill a requirement or get an easy grade, and not as a foundation for critical thinking skills.

"The idea behind having that strong liberal arts foundation and how central studies increases your knowledge in all of these different areas is a broken system. Because what it turns into is just whatever class is easy and you get the best grade in. The whole meaning of the liberal arts foundation being the tools of critical thinking just doesn't resonate with us." (Undergraduate Student)

"The whole conversation about us being a liberal arts school and what that means is confusing. To me, I don't think we do a good job of promoting what a liberal arts education brings to the table and how it uniquely qualifies and prepares students for not just their next job, but for decades of employment opportunities." (University Leadership)
Most/Least Important Factors When Evaluating a University

Respondents were asked to rate a set of factors from 1 (Not Important at All) to 7 (Very Important).
Brand Health Survey Q39 – Q54; Sample (n) = 3693

Factors with an average rating of less than 5:

- Liberal arts education
- Provides a variety of opportunities for international exposure
- Groundbreaking research
- Big-time college sports
- Location

(All of the above factors scored between 4.0 and 5.0)

Factors with an average rating of 6 or greater (these were rated as Most Important across the set):

- Reputation for academic quality
- Reputation for graduates getting good jobs
- Campus where students feel welcome

UND UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
Insight

The benefits associated with the University's liberal arts foundation must be articulated in a more personal and authentic manner to better resonate with current students. Communicating the education's real-world and career-based value can shift perception from indifference to enthusiasm.
The institution and community are ready to embrace change and adopt the bold, new vision laid forth by President Kennedy and UND leadership.
Insight

Now is the time to galvanize the campus community around a unified brand vision—one that is adopted and operationalized by UND leadership across every department.
The University of North Dakota has a fervent alumni base, a strong generational legacy and a powerful history that predates the founding of the state.

"Our history predates the state. We were founded by a group of individuals (mostly women) who defied the odds because they, like us, were determined to overcome the obstacles and make a real impact on the state." (University Leadership)

"We have a great tradition; people are really proud of what UND alumni have accomplished. We each have family members who graduated from UND; we have sons and daughters who currently attend there. It's a source of pride for us, but you wouldn't really know that with how the university acts or communicates." (Grand Forks Resident)
The University of North Dakota brand must bottle the strong affinity its alumni and stakeholders have for the institution. Building off this emotion will establish a connection that profoundly resonates with UND's stakeholder and the wider community.
Research with a Purpose: The University of North Dakota was founded on a belief of impact and innovation; values which permeate the school's culture to this day.

“We have an enthusiasm for inquiry, for creativity and innovation. We have to go out and make a claim and stick to it that we are going to lead in five innovative areas, say big data, analytics, aerospace, biomedical and rural health. If we make those commitments real, if we can deliver on that, then students and everyone else knows what we’re about and what to expect from us.” (Faculty Member)

“I think we’re all very similar. We don’t care about adversity; we just want to get the job done. That’s just the way we are. It’s how we live and it’s how our athletic teams play.” (Undergraduate Student)
Insight

There is an authentic opportunity to position the UND brand as a "doer;" a culture (institutionally and athletically) that rises above challenges to get the job done and make a tangible impact.
The University of North Dakota represents opportunity: UND's variety of career-based programs, graduate schools and liberal arts curriculum make it a leader in fostering professionals throughout the state.

"Our alumni are going to be working in more professional fields than any group in the area. You're going to find that we have doctors, engineers, medical professionals, business professionals all over. We take a lot of pride in our graduate schools, we have the only accredited business school in the state and our flight school is one of the best in the world." (University Leadership)

"If you're a UND student, you are someone who understands opportunity and understands what you can do at this university. You go here to become a lawyer, a doctor, an engineer, a businessman. It's whatever you make of it." (Undergraduate Student)
The opportunities provided by North Dakota's diverse programs and graduate schools are distinct advantages that—when paired with UND's liberal arts foundation, hardworking culture and belief in impact—represent a unique and authentic means to differentiate the brand. This differentiator is particularly relevant in today's economy, which requires fluidity and an eclectic skillset.
UND is a proactive culture: its people believe in doing, not talking.

"One thing that binds everyone together, from our students to the wider community, is that we like to put our heads down and get the job done. It's like how our Hockey team plays; we may not be the best, but we'll fight till the end, and we usually get the job done." (University Leadership)

"You won't find prima donnas out here. We're all workers and doers and go-getters. That's who we are and I think that's what we're all about. We all value hard work, putting our head down and getting things done. If there's a problem, we don't complain or talk about it, we fix it." (Graduate Student)
The University of North Dakota's brand promise must encapsulate the hardworking mentality and competitive spirit of all North Dakotans. The proactive, can-do attitude that permeates every aspect of UND's culture is a distinct and authentic value that can be used to guide the brand's messaging, personality and tone.
Barriers into a Badge of Honor: The frigid winters and rugged landscape is a source of pride for UND.

"It's not easy out here; the winters are brutal, it can get to -30 degrees, but it's something we deal with. It makes us who we are. There's a boldness that comes with outlasting these winters and braving these conditions. You have to be tough and resilient or you won't make it here." (Undergraduate Student)

"People from up here, in the frigid North, we take a lot of pride in that. The whole Scandinavian lifestyle is kind of trendy with simple living, but taking the best out of everything. I mean, I think that really addresses UND to a T. Nothing incredibly elaborate. But we all have fun, we all get a good education. We take pride in what we do and where we're from. I mean, since coming up here, I was dreading moving to North Dakota, but now I find myself wanting to live here in the summer. I take in as much as I can up here. I can't really imagine myself at any other school. We're from the North. This is how we do it." (Undergraduate Student)
Insight

The stigmas associated with the harsh winters and remote location of Grand Forks can be converted into unique points of differentiation and leveraged as bold character traits.
Tough Love is the UND Way: The people of UND are warm and welcoming. A palpable sense of community pervades UND's campus; however, it is not a coddling environment. Doing one's work and getting things done are the norm.

"We're a very close community; we're tight-knit. But we have expectations for our students and everyone kind of gets that. You're here to work and make an impact; we'll help you along the way, but you're the one who is going to be doing the work." (Faculty Member)

"Nobody is going to hold your hand and do the work for you. Students are here to learn and grow and professors are here to guide and teach. That's just our culture." (Undergraduate Student)
The University of North Dakota's culture is woven into the fabric of the state and its people. It is a tight-knit community, united by the overarching belief that real work leads to real impacts. This is the mindset and essence of UND.
When ranked against core competitors, UND is perceived as being the strongest in the set by key stakeholders.

Brand Health Survey Q55; Sample (n) = 3693
**UND Brand Conversions**

Through the research process, SME has identified 4 key brand conversions that must transpire through the development of a new UND brand promise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From:</th>
<th>To:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A brand that has lost control of its narrative.</td>
<td>A brand that tells a distinct story based on its inherent values, personality and attributes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A fragmented brand whose perception is limited and driven largely by athletics and its strong individual programs.</td>
<td>A unified brand whose perception is driven by standing for something that is unique and authentic to the university and all of its programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A personality that is widely understood, but not articulated and consistently communicated.</td>
<td>A personality that is rooted in the university’s unique values and attributes to live in the hearts and minds of its people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A brand that doesn’t differentiate itself from its competitors.</td>
<td>A brand that leverages its unique strengths and personality to stand out from its transactional and overly-aspirational competitors.</td>
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</table>
# UND Through & Through: Rationale for Proposed Brand Positioning Territory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The UND Way:</th>
<th>Real Work=Real Impacts:</th>
<th>Authentically Different:</th>
<th>A Source of Pride:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Places the university's inherent values at the heart of its brand to enliven a culture that is wholly organic to UND.</td>
<td>An authentic differentiator that is relevant in today's fluid economy and meaningful to today's students.</td>
<td>Pivots against the fluffy and overly-liberal positioning of UND's peer competitors.</td>
<td>Leverages the true essence (hardworking, practical, doers) of UND's people to galvanize the community around a brand that is built into the fabric of their everyday lives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## How We’ll Get There:

Position is Key: The university brand must be built on the inherent values (hard working, resilient), attributes (professional development, real-world impacts) and personality (doers) that make UND special.

Tell a Story: The university brand must create a narrative that infuses this personality and these attributes into UND's academic and athletic identities.

Not Just Fluff: The university brand must support its positioning and claims with empirical evidence and authentic messaging to communicate UND's real-world, tangible impact.
### Editable Work Plan

**University of North Dakota**

**1/16 - 6/5 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By Week</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kick-Off Meeting Summary Report (Includes Work Plan &amp; Timeline)</td>
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<td>Brand Audit &amp; Assessment (Review of current assets, communications, brand collateral, &amp; competitors)</td>
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<td>Leadership IDIs (8 interviews, participants to include President, Provost, &amp; VPs)</td>
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<td>Marketing &amp; Communication Team IDIs (6 interviews with Marketing &amp; Communications team leadership)</td>
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<td>Brand Health Survey (Quantitative consumer survey with 10-15 questions; max sample of 1000 respondents)</td>
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<td>Consumer Focus Groups (14 focus groups with consumers &amp; stakeholders)</td>
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<td>Brand Workshop (Half-day workshop with 12-15 members of UND Leadership)</td>
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<td>Brand Book (Includes Brand Positioning &amp; Promise)</td>
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<td>Brand Architecture (Hierarchical system showing how all sub-brands relate to the institutional brand)</td>
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<td>Messaging Program (Building on established Brand Promise, inclusive of TV/broadcast, print, radio, out-of-door, experiential, &amp; social)</td>
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<td>Look Tools Kit / Style Guide (All Graphic art files; Style Guide to provide guidelines for usage of visual elements)</td>
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<td>Concept Testing Focus Groups (7 focus groups with consumers &amp; stakeholders)</td>
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<td>12-Month Strategic Marketing Plan (Inclusive of tactics/goals to reach and engage key UND audiences)</td>
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