



Eastern Washington University Brand Positioning

Research and Recommendations

Spring 2024

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Executive Summary

In January 2022, Eastern Washington University launched “The New Think,” a brand positioning campaign aimed at prospective students and the general community. The campaign showcased the University’s strength as a multidisciplinary institution committed to solving present and future problems collaboratively and innovatively.

With the arrival of new institutional leadership, Eastern’s University Relations team was asked to reevaluate The New Think campaign. Working with idfive, the team conducted a brand validation survey in January 2023 to measure the effectiveness of Eastern’s brand campaign across all participant segments in terms of:

- Preference
- Meaning
- Recall
- Actionability

Using the survey findings and the work of EWU’s strategic planning process, idfive was asked to recommend:

- A positioning strategy and implementation plan to differentiate EWU in the competitive higher education marketplace
- Updates to “The New Think” brand campaign to align with EWU’s new strategic plan and positioning.

This document outlines the work that led to the following recommendations:

1. Position Eastern Washington University as **The Region’s Polytechnic**, leveraging the University’s existing focus on experiential learning that prepares students for success in high-demand fields.
2. Realign The New Think brand platform to support the new positioning.

2023 Brand Survey Findings

Survey Audience Segments

- Prospective students
- Current students
- Parents
- Faculty
- Staff
- Alumni
- Community members

Total Respondents: 1,760

Confidence Level:

- 95% (industry standard)

Margin of Error:

- 2%

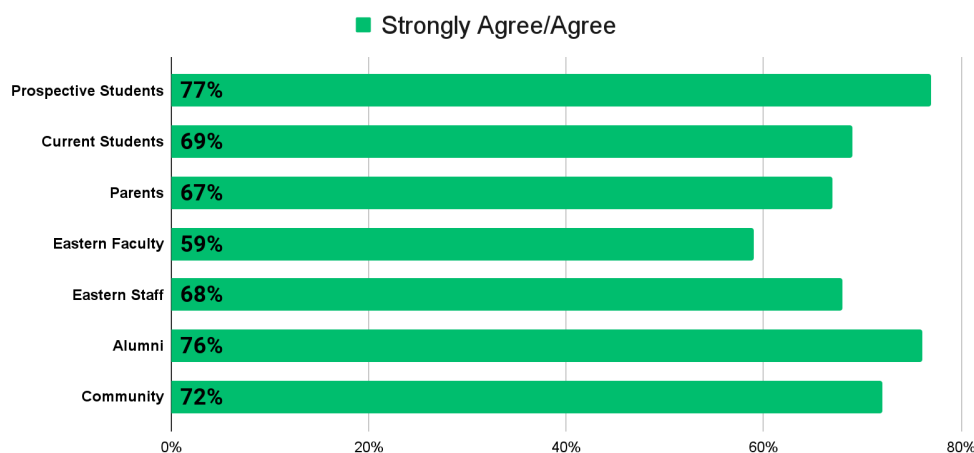
Summary of Findings

- There is little negative brand perception of Eastern among the general public.
- Overall brand awareness can be strengthened.
- 68% of general public respondents strongly agree or agree that they would be interested in learning more about Eastern after viewing sample campaign videos.
- Although Eastern's faculty had the most negative responses of the audience segments tested, overall faculty sentiment towards the content was positive.
- Communicating the full range of Eastern's academic programs and moderating the campaign voice and tone can enhance the campaign's impact.

Although The New Think is a *brand* campaign—focused on overarching institutional positioning and awareness—with EWU's priority on growing enrollments, the campaign needs to align with and support student recruitment, making actionability a key metric in assessing effectiveness.

All audiences viewed sample New Think videos. When we then asked about actionability, all segments responded positively, with prospective students responding most favorably.

Please share your level of agreement with the following statement: After watching these videos, I'd be interested in learning more about EWU.



Key Takeaways

- Communicate the full range of EWU’s academic programs—liberal arts and STEM.
- Moderate the campaign’s voice and tone to more authentically reflect EWU’s identity.
- Highlight “applied learning in high-demand fields” in the positioning and messaging.
- Identify a position in the marketplace that:
 - is unique
 - EWU can own
 - builds on what EWU is already doing
 - connects with core strategic plan goals and objectives.

Draft Strategic Plan Alignment

To ensure the recommended brand strategy aligned with EWU’s new strategic plan, idfive reviewed the [draft goal statements and desired outcomes](#) published on the EWU strategic planning website.

The following draft goal was of specific interest and relevance:

Regional Anchor / Regional Impact

Goal Statement – EWU will launch interdisciplinary initiatives that combine applied educational programming, scholarly research, and community engagement. These initiatives will prioritize economic diversification that focuses on sectors critical to the Pacific Northwest’s vitality. EWU will position its graduates as pivotal contributors to regional wealth creation, equity, and stewardship of the region’s natural resources.

Desired Outcomes (Draft) –

1. Experiential learning, gainful employment, community engagement
2. Urban and regional planning (Cheney & Spokane), community partnerships
3. Alumni engagement (mentoring, job placement training)
4. Representation in regional organizations, lead a community based initiative
5. Investment planning, change management

The emphasis on **applied educational learning** and **experiential learning** coincided with the Identity & Marketing Workgroup’s exploration of positioning EWU as a polytechnic institution, which could involve:

- Renaming the University
- Positioning as:
 - A New Polytechnic
 - A Polytechnic for the 21st Century
 - A Learning Lab
 - Something else?

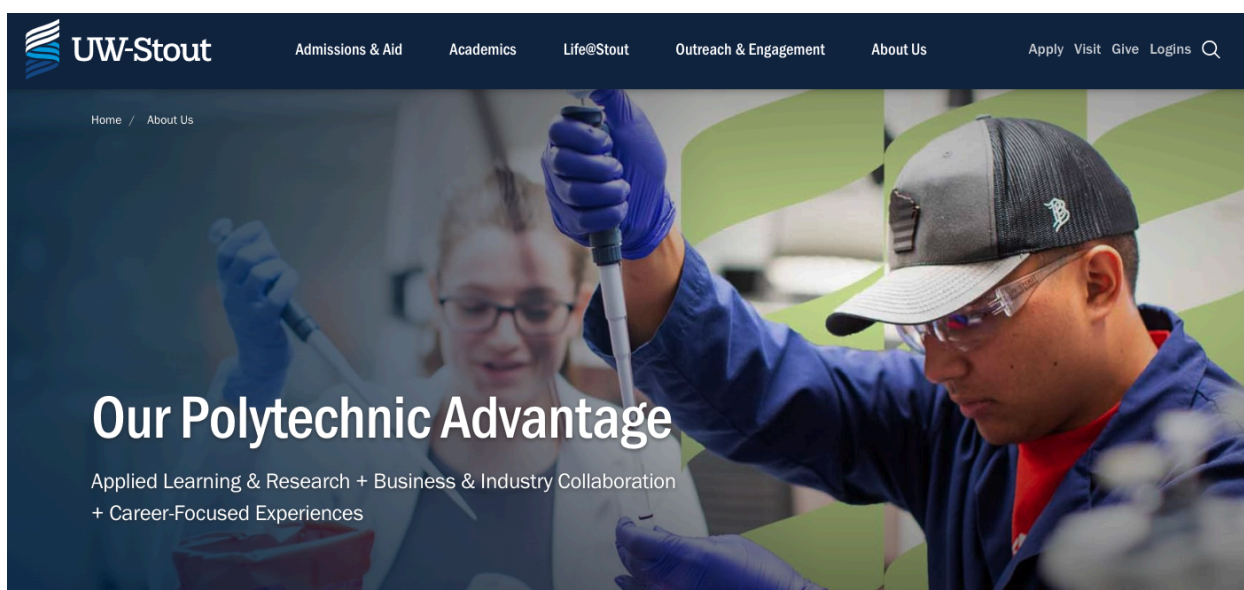
Comparator Analysis

idfive reviewed the transition of two universities to polytechnics:

- [University of Wisconsin-Stout](#)
- [Cal State Poly Humboldt](#)

Key Takeaways

- **A name change is an option but is not required.** Although Wisconsin-Stout received UW Board of Regents approval to be designated as “Wisconsin’s Polytechnic University”, UW-Stout references “The Polytechnic Advantage” but does not use “Polytechnic” as part of its name.



- Wisconsin-Stout’s **process highlighted existing attributes** that led to the polytechnic designation, which included:
 - An intentional focus on:
 - **Career-focused education:** a comprehensive curriculum that prepares graduates for professional careers
 - **Applied learning:** a blend of theory and practice to produce innovative solutions to real-world problems
 - **Collaboration:** partnerships with business, industry, the public sector, and other educational institutions to benefit students and grow the regional economy.

- Defining polytechnics as “**comprehensive universities offering professional, career-focused programs** in the arts, social and related behavioral sciences, engineering, education, and natural sciences and technology that engage students in active, applied learning, theory and research essential to the future of society, business and industry.”
- **Polytechnic messaging needs to include “what’s in it for me?” for all audiences, especially for students and parents.** Cal Poly Humboldt is intentional and comprehensive in messaging about what “polytechnic” means to its core stakeholders.



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Humboldt State University is now Cal Poly Humboldt

Northern California's first Polytechnic University—rising to meet the 21st century

You knew us before as Humboldt State University. But on January 26, 2022 we became **Cal Poly Humboldt**, California's third polytechnic and the first in Northern California.

The big thing to know is that with more resources to build high-demand programs and expand hands-on learning opportunities, we can better prepare our students to solve the challenges of our time. We will address workforce shortages in STEM; revitalize the North Coast economy; close equity gaps in higher education; and provide solutions to the complex social and environmental issues California faces today. Our students and the education they receive at Cal Poly Humboldt will have a long and lasting impact on our communities, the region, and the world.



What does it mean for our students?

As Humboldt State University, we valued the role of experience in higher education, equipping our students with the practical knowledge they need to succeed in a complex world.

As Cal Poly Humboldt, that doesn't change. In fact, opportunities for students will only expand. Thanks to California's confidence in our approach and its historic investment in our future, students at Cal Poly Humboldt will now have more access than ever to practical experiences, from out-of-class research to on-the-job learning.

For students now, you'll have even more classes and experiences to choose from. For alumni, the value of your degree will keep growing stronger alongside our success. And for all of us together, we'll gain a new Cal Poly community to lean on — and give back to — from here on out.

[See what Questions our Students are Asking →](#)

Prospective Students and Families FAQ

Do I need to reapply to Humboldt, now called Cal Poly Humboldt? (Applicant and Current Students)

Whether you have already applied or have been admitted (congrats!) there's no need to resubmit your application. If you have questions about your application, contact the Admissions office at apply@humboldt.edu or check the [Admissions website](#).

How hard will it be to get into Cal Poly Humboldt or will admissions requirements change?

Admissions requirements will not change. If you are interested in applying or have questions about your application, contact the Admissions office at apply@humboldt.edu or check the [Admissions website](#).

What differences are between Humboldt and now Cal Poly Humboldt?

A polytechnic embraces a "learn by doing" approach to education. Academic programming is broad in natural sciences, applied sciences, technology and engineering. It has a strong liberal arts curriculum. It emphasizes hands-on learning, helping students apply what they learn to prepare graduates for that next step in life, whether that's a career or graduate school.

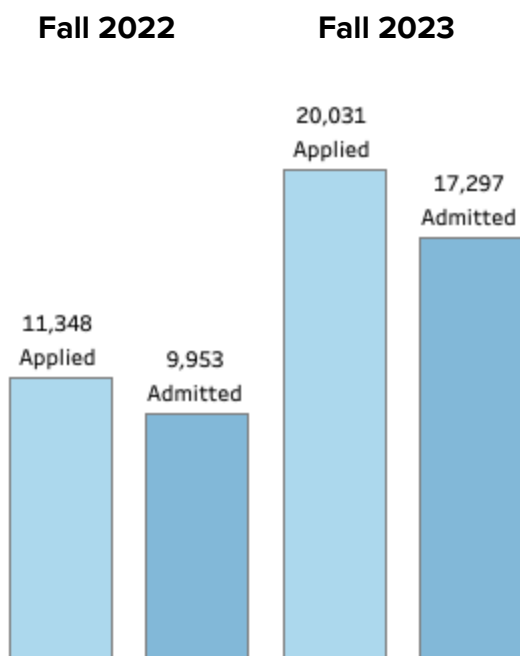
In other words, it's everything we already are; however, with a formal designation, we have the state funding and resources to provide you a bigger and better educational experience over the next several years.

Will tuition go up now that you're a polytechnic?

Becoming a polytechnic will not increase tuition, which is determined by the California State University.

Outcomes

Cal Poly Humboldt's **applications increased by 76.5%** in the first full recruitment cycle after the polytechnic transition/name change.



California State Polytechnic Degrees Awarded

The most recent data reported in Niche.com for degrees awarded by the California State Polytechnic Universities reveals a range of academic disciplines in each institution's top 10 most popular programs by degrees awarded.

For example, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo grants more degrees in Psychology, Architecture, and Liberal Arts and Humanities than it does in Electrical Engineering.

California State Polytechnic University Pomona

Business	1,644 Graduates
Psychology	365 Graduates
Computer Science	270 Graduates
Sociology	270 Graduates
Hospitality and Tourism Management	267 Graduates
Biology	245 Graduates
Civil Engineering	245 Graduates
Mechanical Engineering	227 Graduates
Communications	199 Graduates
Physical Education Teaching and Coaching	198 Graduates

California State Polytechnic University Humboldt

Psychology	158 Graduates
Environmental Science	143 Graduates
Business	138 Graduates
Biology	129 Graduates
Liberal Arts and Humanities	116 Graduates
Wildlife and Fisheries Management	110 Graduates
Physical Education Teaching and Coaching	89 Graduates
Arts	75 Graduates
Social Work and Youth Services	64 Graduates
Criminology	49 Graduates

California State Polytechnic University San Luis Obispo

Business	766 Graduates
Mechanical Engineering	293 Graduates
Biology	204 Graduates
Animal Sciences and Husbandry	187 Graduates
Computer Science	178 Graduates
Civil Engineering	172 Graduates
Psychology	155 Graduates
Architecture	154 Graduates
Liberal Arts and Humanities	143 Graduates
Electrical Engineering	141 Graduates

Recommendations

Approach

Success in oversaturated markets requires occupying a niche with fewer direct competitors: **A Blue Ocean Strategy**.

RED OCEAN STRATEGY	BLUE OCEAN STRATEGY
Compete in existing market space	Create uncontested market space
Beat the competition	Make the competition irrelevant
Exploit existing demand	Create and capture new demand
Make the value-cost trade-off	Break the value-cost trade-off
Align the whole system of a firm's activities with its strategic choice of differentiation or low cost	Align the whole system of a firm's activities in pursuit of differentiation and low cost

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What We Know

- Successful university repositioning initiatives—especially substantive ones—don’t happen overnight (nor do name changes). They take time and resources.
- Students —and their parents/families—are focused on career preparation and outcomes.
- Prospective students responded positively to the New Think themes of change and innovation.
- Initial New Think creative focused on STEM/Environmental programs; the platform’s relevance and effectiveness is TBD for non-STEM offerings.

What We Can Assume

- We will need to provide context and definition to “Polytechnic,” clearly communicating the value to prospective students.

- Education that combines real-world, hands-on learning with career readiness will resonate with prospective EWU students and their parents/families.
- The New Think's focus on change and innovation is worth keeping and building on (because we know it inspired student viewers).

What We Recommend: Strategy

1. Position EWU as The Region's Polytechnic — a “polytechnic for the 21st century” that defines your unique, authentic niche among the region's higher education institutions—both where you are now and where you're going in the future.
2. Develop a campaign, tested for recall, meaning, and actionability, built on a brand platform that highlights:
 - Education that engages, where the classroom is only the beginning.
 - Making connections with people, with career opportunities, with the region.
 - Learning that's real, a roll-up-your-sleeves, look-under-the-hood mentality across all disciplines—where grit leads to greatness.

What We Recommend: Implementation

1. **Introduce a tagline that claims the position.**

Why it works:

- Provides a **bold platform** to articulate EWU's present and future vision and differentiation.
- **Avoids the challenges** of a formal name change.
- Unlike generic taglines, **it defines and differentiates EWU.**

For example only:



The tagline can be used strategically and intentionally:

- As part of the logo (optional; not yet determined)
- As the header in the “About” and/or “Academics” webpage:
 - **The Polytechnic Advantage**
 - For students

- For employers
- For the region
- In selective student recruitment communications.

2. Realign The New Think campaign to support the repositioning.

The core elements of “The New Think” campaign resonated with all audiences we surveyed, especially prospective students. But the actual label did not test as well, and is more about the university than its audiences: this is what we’re doing, this is how we think.

Consider a minor recalibration that softens the tone and invites the audience to be a part of what’s happening.

Draft positioning statements (for illustrative purposes only):

Recruitment/General

- You’re thinking about your future in new ways. So are we.
- New opportunities and new challenges need new ways of thinking.
- Because today’s world is always changing, we’ll always think about new ways of doing things.
- Today’s students need new ways to think about a college education and careers.
- New ways of thinking forge fresh connections—across disciplines, among partners, between the classroom and the community.
- Discoveries are only possible when you think in new ways.
- It will take new ways of thinking to solve today’s problems and discover the next opportunity—that means engineers who communicate clearly; designers who understand science; business leaders who can balance sustainability needs with economic growth and vitality. It takes STEM and the liberal arts, together — a new way of thinking.
- New ways of thinking never get old.

Academic Programs

- New ways to think about business
- New ways to think about engineering
- New ways of thinking about sustainability
- New ways of thinking about STEM
- A new way to think about liberal arts
- We’re thinking in new ways about ...

Student Life

- A new way to discover your passion
- A new way of thinking about yourself at Eastern
- A new way to envision your future
- New ways of thinking about inclusion and belonging

Community Engagement

- A new way to meet workforce needs
- New ways of thinking about community partnerships
- A new way of think about regional impact

Website “About” Messaging

What is the region’s polytechnic?

It’s a new way of thinking about higher education today—for you, for your career, and for the region—where applied learning leads to high-demand careers.

Context

Leveraging the fact that AI-generated content is derived from the consolidation of human inputs—content that already exists—it can be used to assess what’s being written about a particular topic.

Here are AI-generated narratives that reflect what’s being written about polytechnics, specifically related to the “new” polytechnic and the place of liberal arts in the new polytechnic.

What’s a “Polytechnic University for the 21st Century”?

A Polytechnic University for the 21st Century is an institution of higher learning that integrates comprehensive academic education with practical, hands-on experience in technical and applied fields. Unlike traditional universities that may focus primarily on theoretical knowledge, a polytechnic university emphasizes the application of knowledge to real-world problems and industries.

Polytechnic Universities often collaborate closely with industry partners, providing students with internships, co-op programs, and research opportunities to gain practical experience and establish professional connections. This blend of academic rigor and practical experience fosters innovation, entrepreneurship, and a strong focus on solving real-world challenges, making Polytechnic Universities vital contributors to economic growth and societal advancement in the 21st century.

How can a polytechnic university incorporate and redefine the liberal arts?

Rather than isolating liberal arts education from practical training, a polytechnic approach integrates critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills across all fields of study.

Students pursuing degrees in engineering or computer science might also take courses in ethics, literature, or history to broaden their perspectives and develop a well-rounded understanding of societal implications. Students majoring in liberal arts disciplines can complement their studies with hands-on experiences in fields like design, technology, or entrepreneurship.

Also, courses in the liberal arts can be tailored to address issues such as sustainability, social justice, and technological innovation, providing students with the tools to analyze complex problems and propose

innovative solutions.

By incorporating and redefining the liberal arts in this way, a polytechnic university prepares graduates to navigate the complexities of the modern world, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, creativity, and adaptability.