

Faculty Senate topics & questions for Ryan Bradley, VP for Strategic Communications

Description of the Division of Strategic Communications, including mission and role/purview.

What are StratCom's current mission and role (e.g., messenger vs. decision-maker)? Context: several senators are new, and it has been 4+ years since Linda Bonnin visited, and it was at the very beginning of the Division of StratCom being formed.

Strategic Communications exists to tell The University of Alabama's story in authentic, dynamic and strategic ways.

Through policy, guidance and collaboration, Strategic Communications manages the University's overall marketing and communications efforts. Within that charge are responsibilities for the University's main external and internal communications, brand strategy, student recruitment marketing, broadcast /video production, campus ceremonies & events (including commencement), graphic design & production, photography, social media, and web communications/strategy, among others.

Clarity on branding objective, policy, and online resources available to faculty.

Could you clarify UA's current branding objectives and policy? Context: faculty members are sometimes worried about making mistakes when representing UA, so a clear understanding of the objectives and knowledge of resources available would help.

The goals and objectives of the Division of Strategic Communications are to:

- increase awareness of the positive impact The University of Alabama has on the community, state, region and nation;
- strengthen the sense of community, connection and loyalty between UA and its key stakeholders;
- increase the value that key stakeholders place on the ways UA fulfills its mission of teaching, research and service; and
- enhance UA's ability to attract and sustain the resources it needs to continue to be successful.

We offer a broad array of information and resources to provide branding guidance through our Brand Resources website.

The **Brand Resources link** is located on the StratComm.ua.edu homepage and at the top of the site, or you can go directly to brand.ua.edu. All faculty and staff have access to the site through a myBama login. The brand site provides access to a host of materials and guidance related to the UA brand, from learning about the University's brand identity/personality and how we arrived at the key characteristics to specifics on how/where to use brand assets.

Included are several pages on messaging the brand that outline the language and writing style we use in our marketing and public relations efforts. We regularly offer training to communicators across campus to incorporate the messaging to encourage consistent brand language and messaging, particularly for prospective students.

The brand standards pages provide access to download logos, marks and seals, and provides guidance and standards on how and when to use them. It provides information on font standards, colors and more. We also provide helpful design templates on the site – like PowerPoint slides, or research flyers. Stock photos, video and music curated for our brand are also available for use. A direct link to the brand approval FAQ and brand approval submission form are available on our [stratcomm.ua.edu homepage](http://stratcomm.ua.edu/homepage) under “For Faculty & Staff.”

Availability of UA community personnel connected with StratCom, whom Faculty can reach out to for questions (campus communicator network, web developer network, Trending Tide group, Web Tide group).

Are there people close to faculty (e.g., within their units) who are knowledgeable with StratCom’s missions and policies and can help answer questions in the context of their field?

To facilitate campuswide collaboration and to help serve more individuals, we created [three professional networks](#) (links on our homepage) for staff across campus who manage the communications and marketing work for their units. We lead networks for campus communicators, social media managers and web developers. We also encourage faculty who have questions to reach out to their local campus communicator who may offer support tailored to the faculty member’s specific needs. Of course, any of our [Strategic Communications staff members](#) are always willing to help and answer questions.

- The [Campus Communicators Network](#) is managed by our Communications team. It provides an opportunity for staff whose work involves communications and marketing to share ideas, collaborate on projects, and stay up to date on the latest communications resources. Any faculty or staff member with responsibilities related to marketing or communications may join. This group meets monthly during the academic year, and meetings are supplemented by an informative newsletter. Faculty can find contact information for their college communications staff through our online list/directory.
- Our Social Media Communicators Network is [Trending Tide](#). This group shares assets, resources and provides guidance related to managing social media accounts. It helps align social strategies and messaging across university-related social media accounts. Most, if not all, members of Trending Tide are also listed in our [Campus Communicators directory](#).
- The [Web Developers Network](#) provides an opportunity for UA professionals whose work touches web code to share ideas, collaborate on projects, and stay up to date on the University’s latest developer resources. It helps us promote secure, accessible and effective coding to advance the University’s web ecosystem. But it also enhances efficiency by allowing developers across the campus to collaborate and contribute to the main UA web framework in an open-source environment. Most, if not all, members of the WDN are also listed in our [Campus Communicators directory](#).

Web policy (scope, compliance, concern about uniformity vs. unique identity).

StratCom's newly revised web policy doesn't seem to cover a faculty member's personal/research website. Will it remain so? Is it so even if the website is hosted on a UA domain?

Faculty personal and research sites are grouped into the category of 'unofficial websites' referenced in the [web policy](#) and therefore not held to the same branding standard requirements as official websites. This was a purposeful approach to ensure the policy did not encroach on academic freedom. Unofficial websites must still comply with all other relevant [University policies](#), as well as state and federal laws regarding illegal content, copyright use, and web accessibility.

It seems departments' websites in my college look similar, and with a click, one can end up on another department's site without realizing it. Is it intentional that websites look uniform? How can a department retain a unique identity which would differentiate it from others so that outside researchers can find research material easily?

From a brand integrity and user experience perspective, keeping most elements of the UA web environment uniform is intentional. There is value in users being able to navigate through the University's web presence and not be met with several different user-interface patterns to figure out along the way.

The degree of individuality between sites and pages is largely dependent on the resources and professional web staff available to the respective units. Some colleges and divisions have full dedicated web teams; however, most do not. Our web team makes careful consideration when crafting the web framework to develop our products in a manner that accomplishes the [branding and compliance must-haves](#), while allowing the ability for web developers in individual colleges and other units on campus to exercise creativity within greater University branding guidelines.

Discussion/concern about the continued use of Twitter (after being privately acquired) as one of the apparent official platforms for the distribution of information for UA.

With the purchase of Twitter by Elon Musk, many, including experts, expect that this platform will devolve into a platform for disinformation, racism, white supremacy, bigotry and bullying, among many other negative communications. Are there conversations at UA or amongst your higher education colleagues, about continuing to use Twitter as an official platform for the distribution of information for UA and higher education in the broader sense? According to <http://ua.edu/social> UA has 190+ official Twitter accounts. If UA, or all of higher education, continues to use Twitter, will this be seen as an endorsement/acceptance of its practices and/or be seen as being complicit in the spreading of this disturbing information?

The social media team is responsible for the management of the University's brand and reputation within the existing social media landscape. We use social media platforms to reach our constituents in the spaces where they are — and where they want to hear from us. We continually monitor trends and make research-based, informed decisions about our presence on any platform. We continue to maintain a UA Twitter account for the time being and will keep a close eye on how the platform evolves. Other college-, department- or organization-based accounts may choose to remove their Twitter accounts. Our primary focus through social media is to create content that tells our story and amplifies our UA brand. Our guidelines don't allow official UA social media accounts to promote or share information with no relationship to the University.

Prioritization of important information at the top of (lengthy) UA-wide email broadcasts.

Can we please change the practice of leaving the most important information in an email being in the last paragraph of a 3+ paragraph email to being the lead information in the 1st paragraph? During COVID and even more recently, emails with some very important information have left what seems to be the most important action item for the last point in a very lengthy email. Would it be possible to lead with the most important information, especially if there is required action for the reader?

Strategic Communications crafts messages sent from the UA News account, and not all broadcast email messages are sent from Strategic Communications. That said, we strive to communicate as effectively as possible, and sometimes we must speak to a wide variety of audiences (with differing priorities) within one message. This feedback is helpful, and we appreciate the comments and concerns. This information helps inform our work, and we will keep these concerns in mind for future mass communications.