

COM 690 – Masters Project  
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## **Final Masters Project**

### **Hear Us Roar: Real Stories, Real Impact**

Elevating a First-Year Success Program's Visibility and Awareness through High Impact storytelling to strengthen Faculty Engagement

Client: Roar 2 Success  
Client Need: High-Impact Storytelling



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## **Executive Summary**

Roar 2 Success, a student success program at Buffalo State University, is designed to support first-year students who show strong potential for academic resilience but enter college underprepared. Implemented in 2018 through a Title III grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Canfield, 2021) and formally institutionalized in 2022, the program serves as a bridge for students entering Buffalo State with a high school GPA between 75-80, who would not traditionally be accepted through general admission at Buffalo State, but do not qualify for other campus support programs. Roar 2 Success is rooted in the belief that students with academic grit, when given direct support and community, can not only persist but also thrive in a collegiate environment. The program offers wraparound services that create a high-touch, high-impact environment for successful student transition into college, such as: a summer bridge program, a first-year seminar class, intentional academic advisement and coaching, peer mentoring, community-building events, and professionalism workshops.

A study by the University of Chicago on the One Million Degrees program, which offers holistic support, including financial, academic, personal, and professional assistance, found notable improvement in student outcomes; a 35% increase in persistence to the spring semester and a 47% increase in retention (Arcese & Bidwell, 2019). Overall, this study found that comprehensive support programs yield significant student outcomes.

According to Roar 2 Success' leadership, in recent years, the support program consistently meets and exceeds its performance goals. It plays a key role in the university's efforts to support academic success, by positively contributing to student persistence and retention rates.

However, despite these strong metrics, internal recognition of the program remains limited. Among university leadership, deans, department chairs, and faculty, there is confusion regarding the program's purpose and how it differs from other student support services. This lack of visibility threatens both the perceived value and long-term financial sustainability of Roar 2 Success.

This public relations plan aims to raise internal awareness through faculty preferred communication channels, clarify the program's unique value and intention through messaging and high-impact storytelling of student narratives, and building stronger institutional support through strategic communication efforts that highlights Roar 2 Success as a key component of student success and retention at SUNY Buffalo State University.

## **Phase One: Formative Research**

### **Step 1**

#### **Analysis of Situation**

Roar 2 Success, a data proven student support and success program at SUNY Buffalo State University, currently faces significant challenges in visibility, differentiation, and engagement from internal publics. While the program has demonstrated measurable success in improving student persistence and academic retention, it struggles to establish a distinct and strong brand identity. This lack of clarity has resulted in confusion among internal publics, particularly academic deans, department chairs, faculty, and campus leadership, who are often unsure of how Roar 2 Success fits within the University ecosystem of student success programs.

This challenge is further intensified by an increasingly competitive institutional landscape, where multiple student support and success programs are vying for limited institutional resources, recognition, and faculty endorsement. Without a clear and compelling narrative that communicates its unique value and impact, Roar 2 Success risks being overlooked during university strategic planning and budget allocation for other success programs that are more visible and have a clearer identity.

In addition to improving its visibility within the larger Buffalo State community, Roar 2 Success also seeks recognition at the institutional and SUNY system levels to ensure long-term support and sustainability and expand its impact. Getting the attention and advocacy of university leadership and SUNY system leadership is essential to securing funding, continual university support, and possible program expansion.

Overall, the core public relations challenge is raising awareness, clarifying the program's unique value, strengthening its reputation among key internal and external publics. Creating a strategic communication plan is needed to address these challenges and position Roar 2 Success as a vital university retention strategy and generate the needed support to sustain and grow its impact.

### **Step 2**

#### **Research Method**

##### **Primary Research**

To assess current perception and visibility of Roar 2 Success, various primary research methods were utilized to configure this public relations plan. Members of Roar 2 Success' internal publics

completed a survey, participated in a focus group, were observed, and contributed to an in-depth interview.

#### Survey Results:

A 15-question online survey was distributed to campus leadership and The School of Arts and Sciences deans, department chairs, and faculty via email. The department of psychology had the highest response rate; with 77% of survey respondents aware of the Roar 2 Success program. About 36% of respondents learned about Roar 2 Success through word-of-mouth, while another 36% cited teaching the Roar 2 Success UNC 100 courses or collaborating with the first-year program as its introduction to the program

Despite this, 63% of respondents, believed student support/success programs are somewhat impactful on campus, even though 54% acknowledged that they had worked with and taught Roar 2 Success students. When asked which aspect(s) of Roar 2 Success you are most familiar with, 100% of respondents replied first-year academic advising. The same respondents were also familiar with Roar 2 Success' academic coaching services and its peer mentorship program.

However, the majority of respondents were unsure of what set Roar 2 Success apart from other campus student success/support programs. Many felt was similar to EOP and ACE. Yet, one respondent replied "Students consistently mention the advising, coaching, and peer mentor combo. What works for some doesn't work for all, and your insistence on keeping open multiple avenues of support that work in different ways for different students and their individual contexts is incredibly important. Some just want scheduling and advising help. Some only need a wellness check in and motivation to not get lost in the shuffle. Others are, rightfully so, skeptically of asking for help from adults so student peers make them feel safe and supported. CWP sees, respects, loves, and appreciates the success/support program. We know that students with your holistic safety nets have a much higher probability of getting through their first two years with us!"

The School of Arts and Sciences rated Roar 2 Success' impact on student success a six out of 10, with zero being not impactful and 10 being very impactful.

In terms of visibility, 62% of respondents found Roar 2 Success to be somewhat visible, 31% found the program not visible, and only 8% found it to be very visible. When asked what additional support Roar 2 Success needs to strengthen its impact and visibility, faculty offered a variety of suggestions. Below are notable responses:

- "More information about what the program is and how it supports students in the classroom."

- “Student awards and showcases. I know my faculty are ready to celebrate your students, just like they do with Honors and EOP events.”
- “Maybe a student-driven campaign from current participants, and/or an alumni campaign from past participants.”

The school of Arts and Sciences faculty expressed a preference for learning more about Roar 2 Success through the campus bulletin (The Daily), with 92% selecting this option. A close follow up preference was for a program newsletter, and many faculty members also preferred accessing the Roar 2 Success website to learn more about the program. Additionally, the average faculty member in The School of Arts and Sciences preferred engaging with Roar 2 Success through print media.

Ultimately, 46% faculty indicated they were not currently interested in supporting Roar 2 Success, while 23% expressed interest in participating in Roar 2 Success-led workshops and serving as faculty mentors.

The survey data reveals that while Roar 2 Success has strong recognition among faculty in certain departments, its visibility and differentiation as a program still require significant improvement. Despite awareness, many faculty remain unsure of the program’s unique value, reflecting a need for clearer communication and targeted outreach.

#### Focus Group Results:

A small virtual focus group of six faculty from The School of Professions was convened to discuss five questions related to awareness and visibility of the Roar 2 Success program.

Each focus group member was familiar with the student support programs at Buffalo State. However, the discussion revealed that, outside of Muriel A. Howard’s Honor Program, most campus student support/success programs lack differentiation. Dr. Clemon George, an assistant professor of Health, Nutrition, and Dietetics, noted that faculty can sometimes distinguish between these programs if they have taught students affiliated with them or have built relationships with program staff. When asked, specifically what sets Roar 2 Success apart from other campus student support/success programs, Dr. Clarissa Breen, an associate professor of Criminal Justice, pointed to the program’s logo. She stated, “The logo sets Roar 2 Success apart from other success programs on campus. The logo’s image and colors connect the program back to Buffalo State, which leads me to believe that this program supports the academic goals

of the university.” Others in the group agreed, noting that many of the student success/support programs either lack logos or have logos that are not easily visible.

When asked how they initially learned about Roar 2 Success, responses varied. One member was introduced to the program through word-of-mouth and a student referral, while another recalled learning about it during a departmental presentation delivered by the program director a few years ago.

All focus group participants were aware that Roar 2 Success offers first-year academic coaching. Additionally, four of the six members were aware that the program also provides first-year academic advising. One member was further aware that Roar 2 Success hosts first-year community-building events.

Ultimately, the focus group expressed interest in learning more about the program. When asked about their preferred communication channels, all participants selected the campus bulletin (The Daily) and department meetings. Two members also indicated interest in receiving information via the program’s website and social media. In terms of social media preferences, the group unanimously favored Facebook and LinkedIn, with one member additionally suggesting Instagram and YouTube for specific types of content.

The focus group results suggest that while there is baseline awareness of Roar 2 Success among faculty in the School of Professions, program differentiation remains a challenge. The program’s visual branding, especially its logo, developed as a key identifier, indicating the potential for visual digital assets to enhance recognition and credibility. The focus group’s desire to learn more, particularly through The Daily and various social media platforms, highlights an opportunity for Roar 2 Success to strengthen engagement through targeted messaging.

#### In-depth Interviews:

*Shawnté Wilson, MSW – Director of Student Success and Retention*

Shawnté Wilson has worked in human services for nearly two decades, with the past seven years focused in higher education. She holds a Master’s degree in Social Work from SUNY University at Buffalo and is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Educational Policy and Leadership at SUNY University at Albany. Throughout her career, Wilson has approached each role through a social welfare lens, an approach that has enabled her to effectively motivate and support students, colleagues, and community partners.

In 2020, Wilson joined Buffalo State University's Office of Student Leadership and Engagement as the Associate Director of Orientation. In addition to her orientation duties, she assumed leadership of a Title III grant-funded student retention initiative that would eventually evolve into Roar 2 Success. "Roar 2 Success is where I found my passion in the Associate Director of Orientation role," said Wilson. "I enjoy connecting with students daily, especially those who are in transition."

She explained that her work took on even deeper meaning through the collection and analysis of student success data. "Prior to taking on the Associate Director role, there had been limited data on student persistence and retention to help tell the story of the program's impact," she noted. Through her efforts, Wilson tracked two years of compelling data, which contributed to Roar 2 Success being formally institutionalized in 2022.

As the program transitioned from a grant-funded initiative to a permanent campus fixture, Wilson's position evolved as well. She now serves as the Director of Student Success and Retention. Reflecting on the early stages of building awareness, Wilson shared, "There was a time where I would present about Roar 2 Success, our metrics, our student-centered advising practices, and student success stories to departments, college senate, really anyone on campus who would listen, because I knew the impact this program could have if there were campus partners who supported it." In recent years, growing student engagement in the program prompted Wilson and her team to shift their focus more intentionally toward direct student support. As a result, efforts to raise campus-wide awareness, such as presentations to faculty and departments, were scaled back.

Still, the program's outcomes speak for themselves. In collaboration with Buffalo State's Institutional Research Office, Wilson has tracked Roar 2 Success' consistent success in meeting and exceeding key performance goals. The program currently boasts a 72.6% persistence rate and has retained 51% of its student cohorts, directly contributing to the university's overall retention efforts. In the 2023-2024 academic year, Roar 2 Success first-year students achieved an average GPA of 2.44, 22% above Buffalo State's academic good standing benchmark, demonstrating measurable success in academic performance. Despite these strong metrics, Wilson believes the program's impact could be even greater with stronger faculty engagement. "With increased faculty buy-in," she noted, "students could benefit from a more collaborative support system that bridges the work of Roar 2 Success and the classroom."

However, Wilson noted that the lack of current faculty buy-in for Roar 2 Success has made it difficult for the program to receive the same level of institutional support as other student



support programs, potentially affecting Roar 2 Success' ability to serve student effectively in the future.

*Dr. Ramona Santa Maria – School of Professions, Computer Information Systems Faculty*

Dr. Santa Maria is an associate professor of Computer Information Systems (CIS) at Buffalo State University. She specializes in teaching first-year computer fundamental courses. She holds a Master's degree in Educational Computing from SUNY Buffalo State University and doctorate in Educational Culture, Policy, and Society from SUNY University at Buffalo. Dr. Santa Maria prides herself on being a student-centered instructor and aims to collaborate across campus to ensure that students are well-connected and supported.

When asked about Roar 2 Success, Dr. Santa Maria replied "I commend Roar 2 Success and its staff. It's hard work to help students in the way that they do." She added "I know that when I connect a student to Roar 2 Success [to their success navigator], they are in 'good hands' and will receive the support they need."

Over the past three years, Dr. Santa Maria has taught many Roar 2 Success students. These experiences have helped her to build a rapport with the program and see firsthand its value. When asked what she believes sets Roar 2 Success apart from other success programs at Buffalo State she responded, "Roar 2 Success follows through with students. If I have a concern about a student, I know that the staff in this program will collaborate with me to help get the student back on track."

She recalled a time when she reached out to a success navigator regarding a student who had received an incomplete grade the previous semester. "The student had struggled with staying motivated, and I had worried that they would miss the deadline to submit the outstanding work. When I reached out to their success navigator to request support for the student, I was pleased to learn that they were already working with the student and had connected them to academic resources to help them complete their assignments on time." Dr. Santa Maria described this experience as reassuring and appreciated the program's proactive approach.

Despite the collaborative relationship that Dr. Santa Maria has been able to cultivate with Roar 2 Success, she recognizes that other faculty may not share the same level of engagement with the program. When asked how the program could strengthen its impact and visibility, she immediately suggested, "tell Roar 2 Success' data story the same way EOP and similar programs do. If Roar 2 Success provides textbook scholarships, instead of stating the dollar amount, say

something like ‘100% of students’ textbooks are covered.’” She emphasized that compelling data stories can be key to generating greater faculty support.

Together, Shawnté Wilson’s and Dr. Ramona Santa Maria’s in-depth interviews strengthen the public relations research by illustrating the program’s value, affirming the importance of faculty partnership and support, while offering authentic voices that can be used in future communication efforts to build credibility and support.

### Participant Observation

Roar 2 Success champions community. First-year Roar 2 Success students are immersed in community-building environments across campus, from living-learning communities to student leadership workshops and events. One key environment where community is cultivated is in the classroom, particularly through a first-year seminar course called Mastering the Academic Environment (UNC 100). While UNC 100 is not exclusive to the Roar 2 Success program, it supports the academic performance, social development, and persistence of first-year students (ecatalog.buffalostate.edu, n.d.).

Roar 2 Success Success Navigators play an active role in UNC 100 classrooms by assisting with classroom management and supporting teaching responsibilities. They also interface with faculty who teach the course, helping to create a supportive environment academically and socially.

Faculty member from a wide range of departments teach UNC 100 sections supported by Roar 2 Success’. In the fall 2024 semester, UNC 100 instructors came from at least eight academic departments, including: History and Social Studies Education, Anthropology, Individualized Studies, Social Work, African and African American Studies, Coaching, Library Science (LIB), and University College/Academic Success (BSC). This diverse faculty involvement demonstrates the program's ability to reach across academic departments for cross-departmental collaboration.

Through curriculum co-development, faculty worked alongside Roar 2 Success staff to infuse the program’s values, such as academic accountability, personal growth, and holistic student support, into classroom experience. In observation of UNC 100 classes, instructors were notably receptive to the presence and contributions of Roar 2 Success staff. Faculty embraced the coaching and advisement lens brought by the program, noting how it helped students stay engaged and supported both inside and outside the classroom.

As seen in the survey results, faculty members who also served as UNC 100 instructors shared positive remarks about the benefits of working alongside Roar 2 Success students [and Success

Navigators], reflecting the openness for faculty to collaborate and suggests an opportunity to deepen faculty buy-in for the program.

Overall, participant observation revealed that faculty who engage directly with Roar 2 Success in UNC 100 classrooms tend to hold more favorable views of the program. The collaboration between faculty and Roar 2 Success staff within UNC 100 setting has created a partnership that strengthens student engagement and builds internal credibility. These findings suggest that increasing faculty interaction with the program, within the classroom or in an academic department, may be a strategic way to broaden institutional internal support and reduce skepticism among faculty not yet involved.

### Roar 2 Success Content Analysis

Website: <https://roar2success.buffalostate.edu>

The Roar 2 Success website, hosted by Buffalo State University, functions as a central hub for current and prospective first-year students seeking support and information about the program. The site outlines the program's mission, core values, team structure, and a range of collaborative support services. It also highlights key student benefits, including the \$300 textbook scholarship and the Bengal Bound Summer Bridge Program. The homepage is visually organized and user-friendly, with bold headings, relevant hyperlinks, and current images that reflect diverse Roar 2 Success students. There is a prominently placed FAQ section that addresses common questions from students and their families. Additionally, the program's Linktree is embedded, offering direct access to Roar 2 Success' social media platforms, email contact, and other key communication channels.

While the website effectively aligns with Buffalo State's institutional branding through its use of the university's logo and color scheme, it lacks the dedicated Roar 2 Success logo, which if present could enhance program visibility and strengthen its standalone identity. Furthermore, the lack of a targeted FAQ section for internal audiences, such as deans, department chairs, and faculty, represents a missed opportunity to internal awareness.

Bio Link – Linktree: <https://linktr.ee/roar2success>

Roar 2 Success' Linktree serves as a digital resource directory for students, offering quick access to over 20 links that span Buffalo State and Roar 2 Success-specific tools, announcements, and opportunities. However, the current layout presents all links in a single, unstructured list. For

users, especially first-time users this format can be visually overwhelming and may hinder the ability to quickly locate a desired resource.

To improve the Linktree experience, organizing links into clearly labeled categories, like “Academic Support,” “Campus Events,” and “Financial Resources,” would create a more user-friendly flow and help to streamline access to important tools.

## Instagram

Roar 2 Success’ Instagram account has an engaged audience of approximately 497 followers, primarily composed of Buffalo State students, with a smaller segment made up of campus departments and community partners.

As a student-centered platform, the content strategy focuses heavily on user-generated content (UGC), showcasing current and former Roar 2 Success students. Posts from partner departments, such as Career and Professional Education (CAPE), also appear reflecting the program’s collaborative approach.

The Instagram feed boast practical yet timely content for students, including event flyers, academic deadline reminders, student spotlights, “how-tos”, and motivational messaging. With UGC content from Roar 2 Success students, a thread of community and belonging exists on the Roar 2 Success Instagram.

Roar 2 Success also features organized Instagram Story Highlights categorized by topics such as: events, raffles, tips, and motivation. To engage Buffalo State’s internal audience, adding a dedicated faculty highlight could help to build greater awareness and connection.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/bsc.roar2success>

73 Posts

497 Followers

44 Following

Average Post Per Month: 7.5

Average Engagement Per Post: 19.61 likes, .30 comments

## Competitors Content Analysis

The direct competitors for Roar 2 Success are three student support programs at Buffalo State:

- Education Opportunity Program (EOP)

- Advancing Completion through Engagement (ACE)
- Muriel A. Howard Honors Program (Honors)

#### Competitors' Background:

##### Education Opportunity Program (EOP)

Buffalo State's EOP (Educational Opportunity Program) is the inaugural unit of the statewide program, that was established in 1967 through an appropriation bill introduced by Assemblyman Arthur O. Eve (suny.edu). EOP provides institutional admission access, academic support, and financial aid to students who may be underprepared and may not otherwise be admitted to Buffalo State but show promise for college success and demonstrates a financial need (suny.edu). EOP supports students throughout their undergraduate tenure. Due to its success, Buffalo State's EOP program became the model for 53 SUNY institutions and New York State partnership institutions (suny.edu). EOP's student profile mirrors Roar 2 Success', minus the economic profile.

##### Advancing Completion through Engagement (ACE)

Advancing Completion through Engagement (ACE) is designed to help students complete their bachelor's degree within 4 years (suny.buffalostate.edu). ACE supports students enrolled in select majors from enrollment to graduation, offering financial, academic, and personal support. As of Spring 2024, ACE is the newest student support program at Buffalo State, yet ACE is a SUNY granted initiative that has been replicated at multiple SUNY institutions.

##### Muriel A. Howard Honors Program (Honors)

Muriel A. Howard Honors program supports high-achieving Buffalo State students by providing academic support, honors courses, service-learning opportunities, and academic achievement scholarships (honors.buffalostate.edu). This program is both admissions based, accepting eligible students upon enrollment, and continuously reviews eligibility each semester, to admit qualifying students

#### Websites

EOP: <https://eop.buffalostate.edu>

ACE: <https://suny.buffalostate.edu/ace>

Honors: <https://honors.buffalostate.edu>

Like the Roar 2 Success website, the websites for EOP, ACE, and the Honors Program are hosted by Buffalo State University and serve as centralized hubs for both current and prospective students. Each site outlines the program's mission, eligibility requirements, expectations, student benefits, and team structure. Consistent with Buffalo State's branding, all webpages incorporate the university's official color palette and design elements. While ACE prominently

displays its logo on its webpage and the Honors Program features its logo within video content, the EOP website does not currently display a program-specific logo.

## Instagram

Buffalo State's EOP Instagram account serves as a valuable resource for EOP students, featuring event flyers, student spotlights, academic deadline reminders, and program highlights. The account engages its 685 followers through social media trends, staff spotlights, and user-generated content (UGC) from both EOP staff and students.

While EOP's account includes Instagram Story Highlights, they are currently limited to content from a 2023 event and behind-the-scenes moments from a student-led initiative. Nevertheless, the Instagram bio clearly outlines the program's purpose and includes relevant links to its initiatives and student resources.

Similarly, ACE's Instagram bio effectively communicates the program's purpose and provides a direct link to its website. The account engages its 14 followers through static UGC posts that showcase past events. However, it does not currently utilize Instagram Story Highlights. The Honors Program's Instagram bio, though written in a friendly and engaging tone, does not outline the program's purpose or provide links to relevant websites or initiatives. Despite this, the account engages 1,029 followers through static UGC posts and Instagram Reels featuring event flyers, program highlights, and student spotlights. While Honors does use Instagram Story Highlights, they are updated less frequently compared to competitors.

Unlike Roar 2 Success, EOP, and Honors, ACE does not use its program logo as its profile picture, opting instead for a photo of its students.

EOP's Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/buffalostateeop>

88 Posts

685 Followers

195 Following

Average Post Per Month: 3.25

Average Engagement Per Post: 35 likes, 1.23 comments

ACE's Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/ace\\_bsu](https://www.instagram.com/ace_bsu)

8 Posts

14 Followers

14 Following

Average Post Per Month: 1

Average Engagement Per Post: 1.75 likes, 0 comments

Honors Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/buffstatehonors>

306 Posts

1029 Followers

196 Following

Average Post Per Month: 6

Average Engagement Per Post: 55.07 likes, .23 comments

### Secondary Research

#### **Content Analysis of relevant case studies and journal articles**

#### **Higher Education PR Case Studies**

##### *University of Greenwich – Social Mobility through Apprenticeship Programs*

Due to systematic barriers, such as financial issues, lack of information, and familial structures, some students are unable to pursue higher education to subsequently earn high paying jobs. However, according to the Social Mobility Commission, an advisory board in England's Department of Education, businesses that embrace socioeconomically diverse workforces benefit from increased productivity and employee retention (Young-Powell, 2025). To bridge the gap between socioeconomically disadvantaged students and cultivating a diverse workforce, the University of Greenwich emerged as a leader in social mobility by providing student support through a targeted approach. As a result of its long-term institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion, the University of Greenwich was awarded £1.2 million (\$1.48 million) in funding to support underrepresented and disadvantaged groups within its institution through an apprenticeship program in partnership with a network of employers in health, construction, and engineering (Young-Powell, 2025).

Journalist Abby Young-Powell interviewed four student apprentices to discuss the invaluable hands-on experience that they have received while in the apprenticeship program. Teresa Riley, a student who could not afford to give up her job in exchange for attending school, told Young-Powell that the apprenticeship program has provided her with confidence and the practical skills needed in her career field. Another student, Roshen Bernadet, told Young-Powell that the apprenticeship has made a huge difference in the value she provides to her colleagues, praising the program for granting her the opportunity to be exposed to real-world scenarios in her desired career field.

The case study showcases high-impact storytelling through:

- Compelling Student Narratives – By sharing personal testimonials from student apprentices illustrates the impact of the program

- Aligning with Industry Needs – The University of Greenwich’s apprentice program and employer partnerships highlight the relevance of underrepresented and socioeconomically disadvantaged talent needed to help create an effective workforce
- Authenticity and Relatability – The use of diverse students’ voices causes the case study to emotionally resonant with readers and may drive broader institutional and community support.

### *Georgia State University – Panther Retention Grant*

In 2011, Georgia State University piloted a university funded completion grant program to close the gap between the graduation rate and the senior dropout rate (gsu.edu, 2022). Institutional research found that more than a thousand rising senior students were dropping out due to the Georgia State mandate requiring students to pay their tuition balances in full prior to the start of each semester. The pilot grant program aimed to financially aid seniors in good academic standing with a balance of \$2,500 who completed a free online financial literacy course. To show institutional commitment to the pilot program, University President Mark Becker gave a personal donation of \$40,000 (gsu.edu, 2022).

Since the initial implementation of the pilot program, the university has had impressive retention and graduation rates which has justified the ongoing cost of the program based on the return on investment; ~78% of seniors receiving the grant were retained and graduated within three semesters (gsu.edu, 2022). Due to the remarkable ROI, the university scaled the program to serve a larger number of students, including freshman, and the pilot program has been included in the strategic financial plan of the university.

Through the collection and dissemination of data on student persistence, retention, and graduation rates, Georgia State was able to frame the pilot program as cost-effective and ROI-driven, securing sustainable institutional funding.

The case study highlights Institutional buy-in and support through:

- Positioning – portraying the pilot grant program as an institutional asset rather than just a one-off student grant initiative
- Measurable Outcomes and Impact – providing data to drive institutional impact and gain sustainable financial institutional funding.
- Building Credibility – utilizing comparative institutional research to demonstrate how the pilot program has bridged the gap between the dropout rate and the retention and graduation rate

### *SC Johnson at Cornell University – “Propelling Higher Visibility in Higher Ed”*

Like many institutions, SC Johnson College of Business at Cornell University faced growing competition in an increasingly competitive recruitment landscape. The challenge faced was the



need to increase brand awareness of the college and boost recruitment efforts across multiple master's programs (R. G.) To minimize these challenges, it required a deep understanding of the target audience, enrollment processes, and the ability to speak to prospective and current students' aspirations and educational goals. In response to declining enrollment applications, SC Johnson College of Business implemented tailored messaging and strategic targeting. The campaign included distinct media plans for each of the graduate programs, inclusion of school-branded photography compared to previous use of stock imagery, refreshed messaging that aligned with the identity and prestige of the SC Johnson College brand (R. G.) The campaign also included the implementation of media planning and buying, content optimization, website enhancements, and in-depth analytics.

The campaign produced favorable results. Specifically, content optimization resulted in a 57% increase in LinkedIn leads for the MBA program (R. G.)

This case study provides insight on visibility-building in higher-education through:

- Tailored Messaging – defining a distinct message based on the persona of the target audience allowed for highly personalized content and media plans that spoke directly to the needs, goals, and behaviors of prospective students.
- Visual Storytelling – replacing stock photos with branded images (e.g., real students, school colors, campus apparel) helped to boost the campaigns authenticity and create stronger emotional connections, which in turn made SC Johnson College more relatable and aspirational.

### *University of Oxford - Reaching the Right Audience With Micro-Influencers*

The oldest university in the English-Speaking world, University of Oxford has one of the most rigorous application processes. Oxford's application has been scrutinized for being intimidating and inaccessible for prospective students, especially students from underrepresented backgrounds (Notermans, 2025). Due to the complex application process, high achieving students who would otherwise be a great fit at University of Oxford, have been discouraged from applying.

To circumvent this issue the university elected to tap into digital strategy to reach its target audience, Gen-Z students struggling through or opting out of the university's application process. Instead of relying on official university channels, Oxford utilized the likes of micro-influencer and University of Oxford student Tilly Rose. Rose is affectionately known as "That Oxford Girl" on social media; with nearly 40,000 followers on Instagram, Rose optimized her social media platform to share her personal story of her application process to the University, provide practical advice to prospective Oxford students, and help simplify the application process for prospective students (Notermans, 2025).

The social media plan relied on Rose's Instagram and personal blog. User generated content in the form of photos, videos, stories, reels with in-depth descriptive captions, and engaging

friendly toned blog stories served as relatable content to motivate the target audience to apply to complete the application process for the university. The partnership between Oxford and Rose resulted in the offering of free university resources to students on her social platforms that compliment university communications, driving traffic to Oxford's admissions webpage and application, and an increase of Rose's Instagram followers from 40,000 to almost 46,000 (Notermans, 2025).

This case study provides insight on utilizing micro-influencers in higher education through:

- Authenticity – building genuine connections with its target audience through a micro-influencer allowed Oxford to have greater effect on audience conversion compared to traditional marketing strategy.
- Mutually Beneficial Relationships – finding value between both parties (Tilly Rose and Oxford) provided consistent and appealing messaging across platforms.
- Broader Audience – utilizing an influencer, specifically a niche or micro-influencers, helped to extend the University's messaging to a greater number of prospective students who may have otherwise not been aware of the institution or who may have initially planned not to apply to Oxford.

#### *Curry College Case Study – Brand strategy for a hyper-competitive market*

Boston metropolitan area is home to more than 60 higher education institutions (Thompson, 2024). Curry College, one of the smallest institutions in the area, is a private college that has struggled over the years with enrollment in the hyper-competitive Boston higher education market (carnegiehighered, n.d). To encourage enrollment, Curry required an impactful brand identity and a new way to tell its story while differentiating itself from its local competitors.

To determine its brand identity, Curry College relied on psychographic statistics of enrolled students to create its brand personality. Then through research, workshops, and consensus decision-making, Curry's market position was identified (carnegiehighered, n.d.). Understanding the market position of the college, encouraged the development of a new primary institutional logo, student persona profiles, and the launch of a digital campaign focused on brand awareness and reputation. To reach a wider audience than previous, digital banner ads were placed on high traffic webpages, a brand anthem YouTube video was created in the format of a commercial titled "Made for You", tailored messaging was sent to prospective students who met the psychographic profile of the college's student personas, search engine optimization resulted in an increase of website visits throughout the 2023-2024 academic year (carnegiehighered, n.d.).

The results were outstanding. Curry College's "Made for You" commercial won two awards: People's Gold at the Telly Awards and a 2024 Communicator Award of Excellence. Additionally, the college's digital ads won an Annual Educational Advertising Award (carnegiehighered, n.d.). Most importantly, Curry was successful in increase its enrollment and expanding its enrolled student demographics across multiple states (carnegiehighered, n.d.).

This case study demonstrates differentiation in a competitive higher education market through:

- Brand Positioning – through research, student workshops, and consensus decision-making, Curry College was able to pinpoint its unique value to its target audience, rather than competing directly with larger institutions for enrollment
- Storytelling – creating a commercial campaign that resonated with its audience, Curry College was able to create an emotional connection with its “Made for You” campaign tactic.
- Audience Segmentation – relying on high-quality data to define the college’s student demographics and overall student persona profile allows the institution to align with its ideal student.

## **Other Industry PR Case Studies**

### *Always - #LikeAGirl*

In 2013, Always, a brand of feminine hygiene products, concluded that its purpose did not resonate with its new generation of consumers. Through research Always found that the new generation of consumers were more likely to be exposed to negative stereotypes concerning young women and were more likely to succumb to social pressures.

To challenge negative stereotypes about young women, Always launched a campaign in June 2014, strategically at the start of summer where research shows that young women’s confidence experiences the highest drop during the year. The campaign confronted the perception of doing things “like a girl” with the aim to inspire girls to embrace their potential (Vision, 2023). The campaign included a video that showed the phrase “like a girl” being used as an insult to refer to weakness and reflected society’s low expectations and ideas of incompetence often placed upon young women. However, at the midpoint of the video the narrative of “like a girl” changes when group of young women challenges the concept to include confidence, pride, strength, and ability.

The video garnered 90 million views within two months and sparked a global conversation on social channels prompting people to share their stories and opinions using #LikeAGirl. Celebrities, influencers, and organizations partnered with Always to endorse the campaign. The success of the campaign boosted sales, brand awareness, brand perception, and consumer preference (Vision, 2023).

The case study showcases brand differentiation in a crowded market through:

- Purposeful Branding – By aligning itself with a social cause, Always was able to shift its position from product promotion to an advocate for women empowerment
- Cultural Relevance & Timeliness – Always choosing to launch the campaign strategically at the start of summer to combat the expected decline in young women’s self-confidence, reinforced that brand’s authentic approach to addressing its consumers challenges

- Community Engagement & Advocacy – The use of the hashtag #LikeAGirl organically encouraged audience participation. Furthermore, by partnering with influencers, celebrities, and organizations Always positioned itself as a leader in social impact marketing.

### *YMCA – “For a Better Us”*

In early 2016, YMCA of the USA launched a multimedia positioning campaign titled “For a better us,” to encourage nationwide unity and strengthen community bonds (prnewswire.com, 2017). The goal of the campaign was to change the public perception about the YMCA and to raise awareness about how the YMCA is the most effective nonprofits in the country (prnewswire.com, 2017). The challenge the YMCA faced was that the US communities it served had been stained with increasingly high levels of negativity and tension (Olenski, 2017).

The campaign included community centered social media content, print media, and commercials, both visual and audio, that explored the idea of the meaning of “us” in the United States (Olenski, 2017). The campaigns multi-media approach demonstrated broken community bonds, community members’ narratives, and how the YMCA has helped to repair those bonds through team sports, community safe spaces, volunteerism, and mentorship. Additionally, the multi-media campaign materials were leveraged as collateral material for local YMCAs to utilize for fundraising efforts (Olenski, 2017). As a multi-year campaign, the aim is to engage more people, communities, and corporate and government partners with the YMCA from a social responsibility framework.

The case study provides insight on community buy-in through:

- Positioning – developing a compelling PR campaign that shifts the organizations’ messaging from “just a gym” or “just a community center” to a resource that builds stronger more connected US communities
- Return On Investment Engagement – utilizing community and local YMCA’s stories to engage community, corporate, and government partners to secure sustainable financial support.

### **Relevant Journal Articles**

*An integrative review of storytelling: using corporate stories to strengthen employee engagement and internal and external reputation* – Rob Gill, Associate Professor of PR at Swinburne University of Technology

This article examines how corporate storytelling serves as a tool to enhance employee engagement and increase internal organizational reputation. Rob Gill, a public relations and communications lecturer at Swinburne University of Technology, highlights that these key characteristics create effective corporate storytelling that achieve desired communication

objectives: an inclusive approach, emotional content, relevance, prospective value, and promotion of trust (Gill, 2011).

Furthermore, Gill relies on a “storytelling to reputation model” to further drive home the concept of “using stories to engage internal publics by heightening their understanding and commitment to the message” (Gill, 2011). The storytelling to reputation model flows from corporate storytelling to deeper engagement with internal publics, to internal connection with corporate brand, to improved external reputation via interaction (Gill, 2011). The benefits of using storytelling in an organization are vast and link to specific employer attributes. For instance, employees are more likely to adopt a corporate narrative by applying their own experience, this exemplifies employer engagement. Another example given by Gill is “When employees are comfortable with their organization’s values and work practices, they become important assets to enhancing company reputation (Gill, 2011).” According to Gill this exemplifies good employer practice.

Nevertheless, Gill does acknowledge that there are limitations in sharing stories to engage internal publics. He states, “the use of corporate storytelling is often one part of a strategic plan or internal communication campaign (Gill, 2011).” In this, it is important to consider other communication tactics within a communications campaign to ensure that there is an opportunity for all members of the internal public to make meaning of the campaign message.

This article provides insight on corporate storytelling by highlighting the importance of:

- Creating an emotional connection between an organization’s internal public and the organization, which has the power to be more effective than traditional corporate messaging.
- Building meaning and identity within an organization.
- Demonstrating the importance of authenticity and credibility in stories to reflect organizational practices and values.

*How to Secure Faculty Buy-In for Your Initiatives* – Emma Rose, Higher Education Marketing Expert

This article examines both why faculty members may be reluctant to support or buy-in to a campus initiative and the importance of faculty support when seeking to introduce or increase value in an initiative. According to Emma Rose, a Higher Education marketing expert, without faculty support an initiative is likely to fail or be less effective (Rose, 2019). “Faculty buy-in is a shorthand way of saying that the faculty members at your institution support or at least accept the changes [or initiatives] you are implementing,” says Rose.

When faculty buy-in to an initiative, they buy-in with their time, talent, and according to Rose, they also buy-in with their testimony. This process flows in that, faculty will learn about the initiative, use, or support it at the highest potential, then tell students, parents, and fellow faculty about its value (Rose, 2019).

Nevertheless, the struggle for faculty buy-in exist at many institutions. Faculty members' success is often tied to the success of the institution, therefore it is understandable why a faculty member would be cautious to support a new campus initiative, unless they are confident in the results. To address the lack of buy-in effective communication is key.

To avoid limitations of faculty, buy-in, Rose provides a communication framework to address common issues: for faculty who disagree with the new initiative's goal, the solution is to explain why the goal has been set. For faculty who don't see the value of the initiative, the solution is to share proof of concept. For faculty that cannot visualize how the initiative will be implemented, Rose suggests laying out a procedure and timeline. Lastly, if faculty feel coerced into buying-in to an initiative, the solution is to request their feedback and demonstrate that they're concerns are heard (Rose, 2019).

This article provides insight on faculty buy-in by:

- Reinforcing the idea that faculty are advocates and have the power to legitimize an initiative to their peers and campus constituents
- Explaining why faculty can be hesitant with buying-into an initiative, especially when it is tied to the success or outcomes of their role as a faculty member
- Offering a practical strategic communication framework of how to address faculty's resistance towards a new or undervalued campus initiative or program

*Am I missing something by not using story-telling? Why we should ask university students to use story-telling to evaluate their experiences of learning* – Dr. Gina Sherwood, Higher Education Researcher

This article examines the positive effect of student personal narratives on learning experiences with instructors and identification of student support needs. According to higher education researcher Dr. Gina Sherwood, many universities rely on student feedback by way of evaluation questionnaires, however students have grown skeptical of whether their responses are considered or can make a difference. Through examination of a previous research methodology, Dr. Sherwood analyzed a study conducted by Dr. Zina O'Leary, where 47 undergraduate students in the same major, separated into three groups based on their academic level, wrote personal narratives describing their academic year.

Specifically, the finding from the first group of students, which consisted of 15 first-year students, showed that eight of the 15 students used negative emotions to describe their first year in college. Two students described how their personality and character helped them to build confidence and overcome first-year hardships, while the remaining students described their strengths and academic capabilities to sum up their first year (Sherwood, 2019). Through these stories, Sherwood found that students had the opportunity to describe their life outside of the classroom and illustrate the complexity of the college experience to their instructor.

In this study the goal of having student share personal narratives was to help enhance the teaching practices of the instructor. The student narratives revealed the often-unspoken connection between learning and managing emotions, learning experiences that may have been missed or overlooked through the traditional evaluation questionnaires, as well as depicting the learning experience through an unconventional channel (Sherwood, 2019).

This article provides insight on the positive effects of student storytelling on the higher education learning experience by:

- Illustrating how personal narratives re-humanizes students giving instructors insight on student struggles and triumphs in their learning experiences.
- Allowing students to be their own advocates and control their narratives, which in turn builds students' trust and validates their voices.
- Filling the gaps in traditional evaluation by revealing themes and emotions that data sets cannot.

Based on these case studies and journal articles, Roar 2 Success can deepen its impact on internal campus audiences by utilizing a storytelling to highlight its unique identity, builds internal engagement, and communicate measurable outcomes to secure institutional support. To stand out from its competitors, Roar 2 Success will need to move beyond a general student success and support label and establish a distinct identity centered on student leadership, career development, and personal growth. This identity could be brought to life through personal narratives that feature current student, alumni success stories, and faculty advocates who have engaged meaningfully with the program.

The Curry College case study demonstrates how strong brand positioning, audience-specific messaging, and emotionally compelling storytelling can help a smaller institution, or in the case of Roar 2 Success, a visibility impaired program, thrive in a competitive environment. Similarly, research from Dr. Gina Sherwood highlights how student storytelling can humanize college experiences, build trust, and emphasize important student insights that traditional evaluation tools often overlook. Additionally, the strategic use of authentic messaging and visual storytelling can help Roar 2 Success better communicate its value to faculty. Also, by implementing a student-centered storytelling approach, Roar 2 Success can effectively differentiate itself, create stronger institutional relationships with deans, department chairs, and faculty, while positioning itself as a key component of student success at Buffalo State University.

### **Step 3**

#### **Analysis of Organization**

R.O.A.R. stands for Recognizing Opportunities and Achieving Results.

#### **Mission:**

To provide customized support and advocacy to first-year students, with a focus on helping students transition smoothly into college life by building essential skills, connecting them with campus resources, and fostering a sense of community, all with the goal of ensuring their academic success and achieving their full potential.

#### Key Values:

Holistic Support

Personalized Approach

Community Building

Empowerment

Early Intervention

Student Centered

#### Structure and Funding

Originally funded through a federal Title III grant (aimed at strengthening institutions that serve underrepresented populations), Roar 2 Success became an institutionally supported program, relying on the university's infrastructure and budget. It operates as part of Buffalo State's student success ecosystem, often in collaboration with academic advising, tutoring services, and other retention-focused initiatives.

#### Internal Organization

Roar 2 Success has a small but impactful team, consisting of four full-time professionals, one director and three Success Navigators. Success Navigators provide wholistic support, academic coaching, advising, and mentorship to students. There are also three social media undergraduate interns, one graduate assistant that assist with the management of Roar 2 Success' metrics and website development, and 10 undergraduate peer mentors.

#### **Step 4**

##### **Analysis of Publics:**

*Primary Public* – Roar 2 Success Students (First-Year Students with 75-80 GPA and Continuing Students)

*Role* – Customers & Producers

Roar 2 Success' primary public are both first-year students accepted to Buffalo State through the Roar 2 Success program with a 75-80 high school GPA and continuing students that are



successfully retained at Buffalo State after their first year in the program. This public “consumes” the advising, mentoring, academic resources, and community-based programming offered by Roar 2 Success. Additionally, this public “produces” the success metrics for the program, which helps to justify the program’s existence and need for institutional financial support.

*Secondary Publics – Parents/Guardians and families of Roar 2 Success Students*

*Role – Enablers*

Roar 2 Success’ secondary public are the parents/guardians of Roar 2 Success students. This public serves as the external support system for students which encourages the primary public’s participation in the program and can influence the success metrics of the primary public.

*Internal Publics – Academic deans, department chairs, faculty, campus leadership, and SUNY system leadership*

*Role – Limiters (this public has the potential to become enablers)*

Academic deans, department chairs, faculty, and student affairs professionals serve as Roar 2 Success’ internal publics. This public is a current barrier to the Roar 2 Success program due to its confusion about how the program differs from other student success and support programs at Buffalo State. However, with strategic communication and buy-in efforts, this public can become campus advocates for the Roar 2 Success program.

## **Strategy Phase**

### **Step 5**

#### **Positioning Statement**

Roar 2 Success is a data proven Buffalo State student success initiative designed to drive first-year retention and academic achievement. By sharing its measurable outcomes and impactful student narratives, Roar 2 Success will position itself as an essential, data-informed program that aligns with Buffalo State and SUNY system priorities. The success program aims to be institutionally recognized, earn sustained support, and long-term financial investment from faculty, campus leadership, and SUNY leadership.

#### **Goal**

Roar 2 Success aims to elevate its reputation among Buffalo State faculty and campus leadership by leveraging high-impact storytelling to position itself as a leading student support network on campus. The campaign will focus on cultivating meaningful relationships with internal publics to create program advocates, while collecting and sharing authentic student

success narratives. The ultimate goal is to secure long-term institutional support and financial investment.

### **Goal Priorities and Program Resources**

This goal prioritizes credibility, public engagement, institutional alignment, and evidence-based impact. While funding may be limited, Roar 2 Success can meet its goal through strategic campus partnerships with departments such as Marketing & Communications and the Design and Print Center to develop and distribute high-quality content.

### **Objectives**

#### Objective for Key Publics (Internal Public)

*Key Public (Internal Public):* Faculty and Campus Leadership

*Awareness Objective:* To increase awareness, among faculty and campus leadership by ensuring that at least 80% of the target audience can accurately distinguish Roar 2 Success from other student support programs at Buffalo State within six months of the launch of the campaign.

*Acceptance Objective:* To positively influence perception by achieving a 60% increase (a significant shift in perception from current perception) in favorable sentiment among faculty and campus leadership regarding Roar 2 Success as a vital campus contributor to academic persistence and retention, as measured by evaluative post-campaign target audience survey

*Action Objective:* To drive action by securing advocacy from at least 22 faculty and campus leaders who will incorporate Roar 2 Success into student support conversations, recommend it to other internal and external publics, and formally endorse it to campus leadership for long-term institutional funding within one academic year.

#### Objectives for Secondary Publics

*Secondary Public:* SUNY System Leadership

*Awareness Objective:* To increase awareness among SUNY system leadership by ensuring that at least 50% of system decision-makers can accurately identify Roar 2 Success as a high-impact student support program that contributes significantly to Buffalo State's retention and academic success metrics by the end of the campaign cycle.

*Acceptance Objective:* To strengthen positive perceptions of Roar 2 Success among SUNY system leadership, with at least 50% expressing strong agreement that the program aligns with SUNY's broader equity, retention, and student success priorities.

*Action Objective:* To secure increased financial investment, either through expanded SUNY funding or inclusion in SUNY-wide student success frameworks, by the close of the next academic year. With target of at least one direct endorsement from SUNY system leadership.

## **Step 6**

### **Proactive Strategies**

- High Impact Storytelling
  - Showcase Roar 2 Success student stories in a digital format to be included on social channels, the program's website, and campus media releases to illustrate Roar 2 Success' impact
    - ⇒ This can be achieved by utilizing up to six current and former Roar 2 Success students to share their personal stories through an in-depth video interview
- Distribution of Print and Digital Assets for Faculty and Leadership
  - Create informational materials and newsletter to be distributed to faculty and campus leadership to educate this public on the program and its current initiatives.
    - ⇒ These print and digital assets can also be included in the campus-wide newsletter – The Daily.
- Distribution of Metrics to Internal Publics
  - Report collected data to campus leadership and SUNY system leadership regarding student persistence, retention, and long-term program metrics to demonstrate Roar 2 Success' effectiveness.
- Interdepartmental Presentations
  - Engage academic departments by presenting the value of Roar 2 Success and exploring tailored collaboration opportunities that support both departmental goals and the success of Roar 2 Success students within their programs.
    - ⇒ This can be achieved by scheduling department visits during faculty meetings present student data, share student success narratives, and propose ways Roar 2 Success can complement department initiatives.
- Media Engagement
  - Pitch and secure media coverage that highlights Roar 2 Success through compelling, data-driven stories showcasing its impact on student retention and academic success.
    - ⇒ This can be achieved by creating press releases, media-kits, and interest stories featuring student testimonials, faculty advocates and metrics.
- Faculty Engagement Initiatives
  - Develop a faculty mentor initiative that cultivates meaningful connections between faculty and Roar 2 Success students outside the classroom, positioning faculty as active partners in the learning community.

Establish a faculty advisory board to provide strategic input, advocate for the program within departments, and align Roar 2 Success with the campus goals

### **Reactive Strategies**

- Ensure Consistent Brand Identity Across Campus
  - Audit and standardize Roar 2 Success' name and branding across all digital platforms, print materials, and campus communication
    - ⇒ Depending on campus and other department usage Roar 2 Success is often misspelled as "Roar to Success."
    - ⇒ To avoid inconsistency in the program name, it will be crucial to collaborate with both Buffalo State's Marketing & Communications team and IT team to update and align all mentions of "Roar to Success" to "Roar 2 Success" on department websites, student portals, and digital signage. Additionally, update print materials, such as flyers, brochures, and posters, to reflect a unified program name.
- Address Faculty and Leadership Skepticism
  - Develop clear communication, both digital and print, that addresses misconceptions about the Roar 2 Success program.
    - ⇒ This can be achieved by creating a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section on Roar 2 Success' website specifically for faculty. Additionally, creating printed handhelds with a QR code that links back to the faculty FAQ webpage to be placed in academic departments.
- Clarify Roar 2 Success role and fit within the campus success program ecosystem
  - Create messaging to explain how Roar 2 Success complements and not competes with other campus student support initiatives
    - ⇒ This can be achieved by framing responses in a non-defensive tone, example: "Here's how we support shared student success goals."

### **Step 7**

#### **Developing the Messaging**

To achieve the campaign's goal of securing faculty and campus leadership buy-in, the messaging for Roar 2 Success will leverage high-impact storytelling rooted in authenticity, data, and emotional resonance. The messaging framework will focus on clearly communicating the program's unique impact on student success while reinforcing credibility and institutional value.

#### **Message Source**

The campaign's primary voices will be current and former Roar 2 Success students, supported by program staff. Students are the most credible sources to communicate the program's

effectiveness, as they have directly benefited from its holistic academic and personal support model. Former Roar 2 Success students who have successfully transitioned through their first and second years with the aid of Roar 2 Success further demonstrate the program's value and legitimacy.

### Credibility

The campaign's credibility is built on firsthand student narratives and data-supported outcomes. These lived experiences humanize the program and provide evidence of its role in improving student persistence and retention. Students' willingness to share their journeys adds an authentic perspective that builds trust with internal publics.

### Charisma

The relatability of student voices offers a powerful emotional pull. Students can speak directly to how the program changed their college trajectory, persuading faculty and leadership. Their charisma lies in their ability to convey real-life challenges, failures, and victories, which ideally will be admired and supported by faculty and leadership. Staff voices will also add institutional alignment and program related context.

### Message Appeal

The messaging strategy combines both rational and emotional appeals:

- Rational appeal will come from data showcasing improved retention and student success outcomes linked to Roar 2 Success.
- Emotional appeal will come through student testimonials that highlight personal growth, belonging, and academic achievement as a result of the program's support.

This dual appeal ensures the message resonates both logically and emotionally with the target audience, ideally driving acceptance and action.

### Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

- Verbal communication will be emphasized through student interviews, written success stories, and consistent use of the ROAR acronym (Recognizing Opportunities, Achieving Results) to reinforce brand identity and program goals.
- Nonverbal communication will be integrated via visual storytelling, including branded infographics, data visuals, and consistent use of the Roar 2 Success logo on all materials. Students featured in campaign content will wear Roar 2 Success or Buffalo State apparel to display their affiliation and credibility.

Together, these messaging components will build a consistent, impactful narrative that elevates Roar 2 Success as the ideal Buffalo State's retention strategy and an essential program worthy of long-term investment.

## **Tactics Phase**

### **Step 8**

#### **Media Tactics**

##### *Owned Media*

To achieve the campaign's goal of differentiating Roar 2 Success from other student support programs, while also transforming faculty and campus leadership into program advocates, owned media will play a key role. The campaign will specifically utilize digital media, electronic media, interpersonal media, and online publications.

##### Digital Media:

- Bio link
  - To provide accessible information to key publics, a bio link will be utilized to house relevant links, such as: Roar 2 Success' website and Faculty FAQs, calendar of Roar 2 Success' faculty presentations, program newsletter, yearly metrics reports, student testimonials, the program's social channels, and relevant earned media.
    - ⇒ The use of a bio link centralizes all relevant and essential information pertaining to Roar 2 Success. Providing faculty and leadership direct links enhances transparency, encourages engagement, and keeps faculty and leadership informed. Also, including earned media strengthens credibility and further help differentiate Roar 2 Success, position faculty as advocates, and gain campus leadership and SUNY system leadership's attention.
      - ◇ Implementing a bio link into this campaign will require:
        - A bio link platform
          - Although Roar 2 Success currently uses the bio link Linktree, it does not provide deep analytics especially with QR code integration.
          - Instead, the campaign will opt to use Replug, a bio link platform that offers deeper analytics and is designed with marketing and branding in mind.
          - Cost: \$49 monthly, cost to use for a six-month campaign length will be \$294
        - Content Management
          - Maintenance of bio link to ensure all links remain active and relevant, including adding new links when applicable
        - Analytics & Monitoring

- Tracking Replug’s analytics to ensure that bio link data aligns with the campaign needs.
  - Integration
    - Including the bio link within all QR codes (on both digital and print assets), social media bios, email signatures to increase visibility
  - ◇ Public Served: Key Public – Faculty, Secondary Public – Campus leadership and SUNY system leadership
- QR codes
  - QR codes will be placed on all digital assets. The QR codes will lead viewers to a bio link which will house direct Roar 2 Success links.
    - ⇒ The use of QR codes as an owned media tactic helps to aid in enhancing Roar 2 Success’ visibility, encourages faculty and leadership participation and engagement, and promotes advocacy among the key public by providing data and program updates. Additionally, the ease of access through QR codes eliminates barriers to information and allows faculty and leadership to stay informed and involved.
      - ◇ Implementing QR codes into this campaign will require:
        - Design Software
          - Canva will be the design software used to create digital media within this campaign.
          - Roar 2 Success has a premium Canva account, which will allow for the creation of QR codes
          - Cost: Canva Pro – \$180 yearly, cost to use for this campaign will be \$0
        - Analytics & Monitoring Software or Tools
          - Tracking QR scans to gain insight and assess campaign engagement
          - Replug bio link, has the capability to provide QR scans analytics
      - ◇ Public Served: Key Public – Faculty, Secondary Public – Campus leadership
- Website
  - Roar 2 Success’ website will serve as a central hub for all program-related information, Frequently Asked Questions, links to social channels, and embedded videos of student testimonials regarding the program.
    - ⇒ Integrating the program’s preexisting website into the campaign will provide faculty and leadership with a comprehensive resource to understand and further learn about Roar 2 Success. Additionally, the website will help to reinforce Roar 2 Success’ messaging, positioning it as an essential student support program at Buffalo State.

- ◇ Implementing the website into this campaign will require:
  - Website hosting platform
    - As a Buffalo State entity, Roar 2 Success' website is hosted on Buffalo State's web platform.
    - Cost: \$0 to host website
  - Content Development
    - Content Development and management will be led by Roar 2 Success' Director and Associate Director. This includes the production of well-written and regularly updated FAQs, program description, program success stories, and other relevant engaging information.
  - Web Design, Technical Support, and Search Engine Optimization Strategies
    - Roar 2 Success currently employs a data analytics graduate assistant whose tasks include website design, website maintenance, technical support, and SEO
    - Cost: \$0
- ◇ Public Served: Key Public – Faculty, Secondary Publics – Campus leadership and SUNY system leadership

## Electronic Media

To further align with the campaign's goal of increasing visibility and credibility for Roar 2 Success, electronic media will be used to create emotional resonance with key publics. The campaign will specifically utilize video media, interpersonal communication in the form of campus presentations, and online publications.

- Video Media:
  - To have an emotional impact on key publics and to further align with the campaign goal, Roar 2 Success students, both current and continuing, will have their personal academic success stories featured on the website, social media channels, and within presentations.
    - ⇒ Featuring student testimonials will humanize Roar 2 Success and reinforce the program's value. While creating high-impact storytelling, video media will allow faculty and leadership to connect faces to the students that Roar 2 Success serves. Also, it will encourage faculty and staff to actively support Roar 2 Success.
  - ◇ Implementing video media into the campaign will require:
    - Video Equipment, Pre & Post-Production, and Video Editing
      - Buffalo State's MarCom department offers production and editing services
      - Cost: \$0, free for Buffalo State programs
    - Student Participation



- Coordinating six Roar 2 Success students willing to share their academic success stories and Roar 2 Success experiences.
  - May require an informed consent form to ensure that students are shown in their likeness
  - Additionally, incentives for student's participation may be required.
  - Cost: \$1800, three \$300 academic scholarships for current first-year Roar 2 Success students and three \$300 textbook scholarships for continuing Roar 2 Success students. This cost will be included in the influencer marketing cost.
  - Script Development
    - To ensure that each student testimonial is effective and aligns with the campaign's messaging, a pre-planned script will need to be developed. The script will include specific questions that aids Roar 2 Success' positioning, along with key words and terms.
    - Roar 2 Success employs media interns and will utilize them to assist with script development. Specifically, one intern is a Television and Film (TFA) major and thrives in creating and producing content for Roar 2 Success
    - Cost: \$0
  - Video Distribution
    - Strategically placing the video across platforms, specifically, Roar 2 Success' website, social media channels (Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Facebook), program presentations, campus television channels, to maximize reach and impact.
  - Analytics
    - To monitor engagement, analytic tools on social media platforms, such as YouTube and Instagram Insights, will help to assess the videos effectiveness
- ◇ Publics Served: Key Public – Faculty, Secondary Publics – Campus leadership and SUNY system leadership

#### Interpersonal Communication:

- Speech (Presentations)
  - Presentations serve as a platform to share compelling student stories, provide faculty with data-driven evidence of the importance of Roar 2 Success, and showcase the program's effectiveness. Additionally, engaging faculty and leadership through presentations, allows Roar 2 Success to participate in direct dialogue with key publics.

⇒ By offering presentations about the program, Roar 2 Success can verbally articulate its value to Buffalo State, its differences that sets it apart from other student support programs, and how the program aligns itself with the campus' retention efforts.

◇ Implementing presentations in the campaign will require:

- Presentation Development
  - Professionally designed slide decks with Roar 2 Success' branding
  - Slide decks include program data, student testimonials, and key differentiators
  - Slide decks will be created in Canva Pro
  - Cost: \$0, Roar 2 Success has a premium/Canva Pro account
- Speaker/Presenter
  - The Director, Shawnté Wilson, will serve as the primary speaker for presentations, with a rotating Roar 2 Success staff member to accompany her
  - Also, current and continuing Roar 2 Success students will help to facilitate campus presentations
- Coordination of Faculty and Leadership Availability
  - It will be important to coordinate the Roar 2 Success presentations with faculty and department meetings and to ensure that they do not overlap with campus events or campus leadership events.
- Follow-up Materials and Feedback
  - At the completion of each presentation, it will be essential to provide attendees with digital and physical assets, including a QR code that links back to Roar 2 Success' website and a post-presentation survey or question-and-answer segment.
  - Physical assets can consist of handheld info cards, which can be designed in Canva and printed at Buffalo State's design and print center
  - Cost of handheld info cards: \$400 for 500 count

◇ Public Served: Key Public – Faculty (Specifically Deans and Department Chairs), Secondary Public – Campus Leadership

Print or Online Publications:

- Serial publication (Newsletter)
  - A monthly distributed Newsletter helps to keep faculty and campus leadership engaged with Roar 2 Success students, initiatives, and data developments.

⇒ A newsletter will help to reinforce Roar 2 Success' value and differentiate it from other Buffalo State student support programs through consistent communication that supports faculty advocacy.

◇ Implementing a Newsletter into this campaign will require:

- Content Development
  - Writing and editing articles, student spotlights, and program updates
- Design
  - Create a visually appealing branded template through Canva
- Distribution
  - The newsletter will be published on the Roar 2 Success website
  - The newsletter can be distributed via a link in the campus publications The Daily. The Daily is distributed by MarCom and is of no charge to Roar 2 Success to feature information
  - Providing a link to the published newsletter will drive traffic to the Roar 2 Success website.
- Contributions
  - It will be crucial to gather contributions from Roar 2 Success students about academic success and be made aware of campus initiatives that Roar 2 Success should align its data with

◇ Public Served: Key Public – Faculty, Secondary Public – Campus Leadership

- Corporate report (Data Report)

- A data report will serve as comprehensive document showcasing Roar 2 Success' program achievements, challenges, and future goals. Data will be included from the previous and current school and compared to current data for the institution.

⇒ Data reports will help to drive differentiation from other campus support programs through impact and credibility. With measurable metrics that align with the institution's retention goals, the likelihood of sustainability and financial support increases.

◇ Implementing a data report into this campaign will require:

- Content Development
  - Data to be included on report: enrollment data and student retention and persistence statistics
- Design
  - It will be crucial that the report is presented in a professional layout and includes accessible graphics and visualization

- Distribution
  - The data report will be published on that Roar 2 Success website and shared via the daily to faculty and email for campus leadership
- Institutional Collaboration
  - Working with institutional research and advancement for proof of program and institution data
  - Charging data analytics graduate assistant to gather clean current Roar 2 Success data
- ◇ Public Served: Key Public – Faculty, Secondary Public - Campus Leadership and SUNY system leadership

### *Earned Media*

Earned media play a significant role in this campaign as it provides an unbiased view of Roar 2 Success will enhancing the credibility and visibility of the program beyond internal campus communication. The campaign will specifically utilize news interviews to reinforce the program's impact and legitimacy.

### Interactive Media Engagement:

- News Interview
  - A news interview featuring Roar 2 Success provides third-party credibility while elevating the program's visibility among faculty, campus leadership, and SUNY system stakeholders.
    - ⇒ Media coverage through a news interview helps to establish Roar 2 Success as an essential Buffalo State success initiative. Additionally, a well-placed interview can aid in securing institutional and SUNY buy-in and financial support.
      - ◇ Implementing a news interview into this campaign requires:
        - Media Outreach
          - The media outlets that Roar 2 Success is aiming to be featured in is *The Buffalo State Buzz* and *Inside Higher Education*
          - Key campus stories are featured in *The Buffalo State Buzz* publication.
          - Key SUNY initiatives and institutions have been featured in the *Inside Higher Education* publication. An example of a SUNY institution feature about a student success program: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/student-success/academic-life/2023/05/25/new-job-mayra-lopez-perez-university-buffalo-suny>
        - Identified Spokesperson

- The spokesperson for Roar 2 Success will be the Director as she is aware of data trends over the lifespan of Roar 2 Success, she would be aware of key campaign messaging, and would be able to provide key talking point
- Press Materials
  - Media pitch and program facts would need to be drafted and disbursed
  - Sabrina Kahwaty, a digital content manager for Buffalo State's Marketing and Communications department, assists with managing and distributing *The Buffalo State Buzz*
  - Ashley Mowreader, a Student Success reporter for *Inside Higher Ed*, would be the idea journalist contacted to secure a news interview in *Inside Higher Education*.
- Coordinating with Journalist
  - Scheduling the interview and providing additional material, such as: relevant photos, student stories, appropriate links to website and social channels, etc.
- ◇ Public Served: Key Public – Faculty, Secondary Publics – Campus leadership and SUNY system leadership, Unintentional Public – broader academic community

### *Shared Media*

Shared media is vital to this campaign as it allows Roar 2 Success to directly engage with its key publics and amplify its message in a community-driven manner. Moreover, shared media further supports brand awareness and can help differentiate Roar 2 Success from its campus competitors. The campaign will specifically utilize social networking sites, specifically Facebook and LinkedIn and video sharing through YouTube and Instagram Reels.

### Social Networking Sites:

- Facebook & LinkedIn
  - Currently, Roar 2 Success does not have a Facebook or a LinkedIn page. Roar 2 Success' key publics have traditionally been first-year students and families, whose social media preference has been Instagram and more recently TikTok. However, Facebook and LinkedIn have been found to be the preferred faculty and campus leadership social media platforms.
    - ⇒ Facebook, a preferred social media channel for faculty, will help connect with faculty in a more informal yet informative manner.
    - ⇒ LinkedIn offers a professional network allows for thought leadership content that faculty may be responsive to. Additionally, LinkedIn is the ideal platform to share news interviews

- ◇ Implementing Facebook and LinkedIn into this campaign will require:
  - Content Development
    - Provide regular program updates, student testimonials, and data-driven success stories.
    - Using Canva to create visually engaging posts
  - Community Management
    - Actively engaging with key publics through comments, shares, and direct messaging
    - Community Management can be completed by Roar 2 Success media interns
    - Cost: \$0
  - Shared Content
    - Sharing high-quality student testimonials videos produced by Buffalo State's MarCom on LinkedIn
    - Sharing student testimonial transcripts and student photos on Facebook
    - Linking earned media news interviews on both Facebook and LinkedIn
- ◇ Publics Served: Key Public – Faculty, Secondary Public – campus leadership, SUNY system leadership

#### Video Sharing:

- YouTube & Instagram Reels:
  - Long (YouTube) and short (Instagram Reels) format videos aid in showcasing student testimonials and program success stories.
    - ⇒ Video content can increase key public engagement and allows for more compelling storytelling to differentiate Roar 2 Success from other campus programs.
    - ◇ Implementing YouTube and Instagram Reels into this campaign will require:
      - Content Planning
        - Sharing high-quality student testimonials videos produced by Buffalo State's MarCom on both YouTube and Instagram, appropriately formatted and edited to fit both platforms
      - Search Engine Optimization
        - Using relevant keywords and hashtags: #Roar2Success, #R2S, #StudentSuccess, #FirstYearSuccess, #HolisticSupport, #StudentCentered, #BengalSuccess
        - Using well-written descriptions to thoroughly explain each YouTube and Instagram Reel
      - Community Management

- Actively engaging with key publics through comments, shares, and direct messaging
- Community Management can be completed by Roar 2 Success media interns
- Cost: \$0
- ◇ Public Served: Key Public – Faculty, Secondary Public – Campus Leadership and SUNY system leadership

### *Paid Media*

Paid media will be used strategically within this campaign to expand the reach of Roar 2 Success and precisely target the key public. The campaign will specifically utilize influencer marketing to tap into trusted voices who can authentically share the impact of Roar 2 Success.

- Influencer Marketing:
  - Students willing to share their personal testimonial about Roar 2 Success will act as ambassadors or program influencers. Additionally, faculty and campus leadership as advocates of the program will serve as campus ambassadors.
    - ⇒ Leveraging influencers and ambassadors from multiple publics will help to amplify Roar 2 Success' credibility, visibility, and encourage key publics to act and support Roar 2 Success.
      - ◇ Implementing Influencer Marketing into this campaign will require:
        - Influencer and Ambassador Selection
          - Identifying Influential Roar 2 Success students and supportive faculty
            - Δ Identify six Roar 2 Success students willing to share their academic success stories and Roar 2 Success experiences. Three first-year Roar 2 Success student and three continuing Roar 2 Success students.
            - Δ Identify two Faculty or Campus Leadership members to act as ambassadors
          - Optimizing influencers and ambassador's social media platforms, specifically LinkedIn, to align with Roar 2 Success' social platforms.
        - Content Sharing
          - Creating talking points for influencers and ambassadors that align with the campaign's objective
        - Incentives
          - Providing recognition for faculty ambassadors and small scholarships for student influencers.
          - Cost: \$1800, three \$300 academic scholarships for current first-year Roar 2 Success students and three

- \$300 textbook scholarships for continuing Roar 2 Success students
  - Acknowledgement of faculty ambassadors at annual Roar 2 Success welcome celebration.
- ◇ Public Served: Key Public – Faculty, Secondary Public – Campus leadership and SUNY system leadership, Unintentional Public - Current and prospective students

## **Step 9**

### **Tactics Schedule**

This campaign will be implemented over a seven-month period, from February to August. This timeframe was selected as it aligns with a full spring semester and extends into the quieter summer months on campus, allowing for consistent engagement, reflection, and meaningful change. From February to May, the campaign can generate campus buzz, immediate in-person feedback from key publics, and benefit from promotional opportunities at campus events. From June to August, the campaign can engage a more focused audience, as their attention is less divided by on-campus responsibilities. Additionally, since the fall semester begins in August, this period allows for substantial time to prepare for the goal of structural and financial integration, support, and long-term impact.

The campaign is designed to gradually build visibility, awareness, credibility, and advocacy for Roar 2 Success among the campaign's key publics.

#### **Month 1 – February: Preparation**

- Inform Roar 2 Success staff of campaign duties
- Audit and standardize Roar 2 Success' name and branding across all digital platforms
- Distribute survey to assess the key publics' awareness on Roar 2 Success
- Finalize campaign content and visual branding, including slide decks, the Replug landing page (bio link), digital and print assets, and newsletter content and template.
- Finalize appropriate links for Replug and generate corresponding QR codes.
- Finalize scripts and guidelines for student testimonials and influencer marketing campaigns.
- Refresh the website to include campaign-specific FAQs for faculty
- Select students to participate in testimonials.
- Coordinate the campaign tactics schedule, including presentation and filming timelines.
- Review and adjust the campaign strategy as needed

#### **Month 2 – March: Soft Campaign Launch**

- Launch Replug and QR code across all digital and print assets
- Publish the first newsletter on the Roar 2 Success website and link it to Replug



- Promote the newsletter across communication channels, including The Daily and social media platforms.
- Monitor engagement analytics: Replug's metrics, social media metrics, and website traffic
- Film two student testimonial videos.
- Release the student testimonials on "Buffalo State Gives" to promote the program support fundraising efforts
- Schedule and present two faculty presentations at department or academic school meetings. Disburse feedback survey at the end of each presentation.
- Gather and review presentation feedback
- Schedule remaining faculty presentations
- Review and adjust the campaign strategy as needed

#### Month 3 – April: Campaign Launch

- Complete all scheduled faculty presentations.
- Review presentation feedback and update website FAQs accordingly
- Film the remaining student testimonial videos
- Release additional student testimonials on the day of Bengala to generate campus buzz and elevate program visibility.
- Publish the second newsletter featuring updated content and program initiatives; link to Replug and share via The Daily and social media platforms
- Launch influencer and ambassador campaigns
- Continue monitoring engagement analytics
- Review and adjust the campaign strategy as needed

#### Month 4 – May: Continuation of Campaign Launch

- Share student testimonial videos across the website and social media channels.
- Publish the third newsletter with new content and program updates; link it to Replug and share via The Daily and social media platforms
- Continue monitor engagement analytics
- Send media pitch to Sabrina Kahwaty of *The Buffalo State Buzz*
- Send media pitch to Ashley Mowreader of *Inside Higher Ed*
- Review and adjust the campaign strategy as needed

#### Month 5 & 6 – June & July: Continuation of Campaign Launch and Amplification

- Analyze persistence and retention data from the spring semester
- Publish data finding on the website
- Share key data findings to communication channels – a whitepaper in The Daily and data visualizations on social media
- Publish the fourth and fifth newsletter featuring updated content, program initiatives, and program data; link them to Replug and share them via The Daily and social media platforms

- Share the *The Buffalo State Buzz* and *Inside Higher Education* article across website and social media platforms, and provide the link to faculty and campus leadership through The Daily
- Review and adjust the campaign strategy as needed

#### Month 7 – August: Campaign Assessment

- Evaluate campaign performance through a survey to assess the key public's awareness on Roar 2 Success
- Evaluate direct feedback and platform analytics
- Present an impact report to campus leadership and SUNY system leadership
- Based on data findings and engagement metrics, develop a sustainability plan for ongoing program structure and financial support

### Campaign Budget

Campaign budget: \$3000

Media Tactic	Cost Item	Cost	Notes
<b>Owned Media</b>			
Bio Link	Replug Subscription (6 months)	\$294	\$49 per month for enhanced analytics & QR Code integration
	Content Management & Monitoring	\$0	Covered by Roar 2 Success staff
	Integration into digital and print assets	\$0	Covered by Roar 2 Success staff
QR Codes	Canva Pro Subscription	\$0	Already purchased (\$180), no new cost
	QR Analytics via Replug	\$0	Included in Replug subscription
Website	Website host	\$0	Website hosting is provided through Buffalo State
	Content Development	\$0	Managed by Director & Associate Director
	SEO and Technical Support	\$0	Managed by Graduate Assistant
Video Media	Production/Editing	\$0	Provided by Buffalo State's MarCom Department

	Script Development	\$0	Assigned to Media Intern
Presentations	Canva Pro slide deck design and info card design	\$0	Already purchased (\$180), no new cost
	Printing Info cards	\$400 for 500 ct.	Purchased through Buffalo State's Print and Design Center. Cost is \$0.80 per printed card = \$400
	Scheduling and Speakers	\$0	To be completed by Roar 2 Success Staff
Newsletter	Template design via Canva	\$0	Already purchased, no new cost
	Content Development	\$0	To be completed by Roar 2 Success Staff
	Distribution via Website & The Daily	\$0	No additional cost
Data Report	Content Development (Data Analysis)	\$0	Managed by Graduate Assistant
	Design (Infographics and Layout)	\$0	Already purchased, no new cost
	Distribution via Website & Email	\$0	No additional cost
<b>Earned Media</b>			
New Interviews	Pitching Coordination	\$0	Roar 2 Success staff – Director or Associate Director
	Interviews	\$0	Earned coverage
<b>Paid Media</b>			
Influencer Marketing	Student Incentives/reimbursement	\$1,800	6 student influencers at a rate of \$300 (3 academic scholarships and 3 textbook scholarships)
	Script Development and social media guidelines	\$0	Managed by Media Intern and Roar 2 Success Staff
Faculty Ambassador	Faculty Incentive	\$0	Invitation to Roar 2 Success Events

	Script development and social media guidelines	\$0	Managed by Media Intern and Roar 2 Success Staff
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Total Campaign Cost: \$2,494

## **Step 10** **Evaluation**

Evaluating this public relations plan will not only determine its impact on the key publics but also its larger institutional effects. According to Communication Strategy Group (CSG), higher education institutions rely on effective public relations strategies for a myriad of reasons, but specifically to establish credibility, create community connections, gain a competitive advantage, and to develop crisis communication plans (Team CSG, 2023).

Assessing this public relations plan from the lens of Roar 2 Success and its impact on Buffalo State University deans, chairs, and faculty will help to determine if the public relations tactics used were successful in creating faculty and leadership ambassadors for Roar 2 Success, as well as securing financial and structural support from campus and SUNY leadership.

Additionally, evaluation can inform future public relations strategies for Roar 2 Success as it aims to further differentiate itself from current and emerging student support competitors while also serving as a blueprint for future Roar 2 Success programs at other SUNY institutions.

### **Methodology**

This campaign will utilize a before-and-after study methodology to evaluate its effectiveness.

Before launching the public relations campaign, a pre-campaign survey will be distributed to assess the key public's awareness of the Roar 2 Success program. The survey will determine whether key publics can differentiate Roar 2 Success from other student success and support programs on campus and how impactful they perceive student success and support programs to be at Buffalo State. One key question in this survey will be: Would you be interested in supporting Roar 2 Success? This question serves as a precursor for the follow-up survey, which will be distributed at the end of the campaign. By analyzing responses to this question after the campaign, will allow for the assessment of whether the campaign had a positive impact on engagement and support for Roar 2 Success and if it created a call-to-action for key publics.

To ensure clear and measurable results, most of the survey questions will be multiple choice rather than open-ended. Specifically, when faculty are asked how they would like to support Roar 2 Success, they will be able to select from the following options:

- Promoting Roar 2 Success in department meetings
- Partnering with Roar 2 Success on a campus initiative

- Participating in a R2S workshop
- Serving as a faculty mentor
- Serving as a faculty ambassador
- Other – please specify
- I'm not interested at this time

This evaluation methodology will help to determine the campaign's success in promoting awareness, engagement, and long-term program support.

## Evaluation of Objectives

### Awareness Objective

The awareness objective is crucial for evaluating this public relations campaign as it will measure the level of recognition and understanding of the Roar 2 Success program by the key publics. Since faculty and campus leadership may not currently differentiate Roar 2 Success from other student success or support programs, assessing awareness helps to determine if the campaign effectively communicates the program's unique value. Without campaign awareness, key publics may not engage meaningfully or act to support Roar2 Success. By evaluating awareness metrics before and after the campaign, it can assess whether the messaging, shared media, and outreach efforts successfully increased recognition and knowledge about Roar 2 Success

#### *Awareness objective for owned media:*

**Presentations** – To assess the success of campus presentations on the key public, the evaluation phase of the campaign will consider the number of faculty that attended the presentations, the percentage of faculty departments reached and post-presentation survey responses that measure awareness and perception.

**Newsletter** – To determine the success of the monthly newsletter, the campaign evaluation will assess the monthly readership of newsletter and faculty, as well as examine faculty and campus leadership discussion on topics featured in newsletters.

**Data Report** – To measure the success of reporting Roar 2 Success semesterly data to key publics, the evaluation phase of the campaign will monitor the response from leadership, including feedback, institutional policy discussions, and financial discussions.

#### *Awareness objective for earned media:*

**News Interview** – To determine if third-party credibility was earned through a news feature in *The Buffalo State Buzz* and *Inside Higher Education* publications, the evaluation phase of this campaign will assess the mention of the articles in campus publications, like *The Daily*. Also,

faculty and leadership discussion about the articles will further be considered as part of this evaluation.

*Awareness objective for shared media:*

Social Networking Sites – To measure the success of creating Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube pages for Roar 2 Success, follower growth will be assessed based on faculty and leadership followership.

Video Sharing – To evaluate the success of implementing long and short format videos in this campaign, there will be an assessment of the discoverability of campaign hashtags (#Roar2Success, #R2S, #StudentSuccess, #Bengal Success, etc.). Additionally, content visibility will be assessed by the total number of views.

*Awareness objective for paid media:*

Influencer Marketing – To determine the value of including student influencers and faculty ambassadors in this campaign, student influencers and faculty ambassador's follower growth, especially faculty and leadership followership, will be assessed.

Acceptance Objective

The acceptance objective is important as it will evaluate how key publics perceive Roar 2 Success, it will especially determine if they view the program as valuable and credible. Measuring campaign acceptance through survey responses and engagement metrics, will help to determine if the campaign was successful in promoting trust and faculty advocacy. If deans, chairs, and faculty accept that Roar 2 Success is a mission driven student support program with positive student success outcomes, they may be more willing to commit to actively supporting the program.

*Acceptance objective for owned media:*

Website, Video Media, Newsletter – To assess the impact of these own media tactics, the time spent by the key publics engaging with these media outlets will be evaluated with web and video analytics.

Presentations – To determine the perception growth in key publics, post-presentation surveys will be distributed to assess how presentation participants perceive Roar 2 Success and how the information provided in the presentations has been received.

*Acceptance objective for earned media:*

News Interview – To evaluate if *The Buffalo State Buzz* and *Inside Higher Education* articles enhanced credibility among key publics, positive reception from faculty will be assessed via a brief survey linked in the bio link to the articles requesting faculty feedback about each article. Additionally, if there are other media outlets that wish to cover Roar 2 Success after both *The Buffalo State Buzz* and *Inside Higher Education* articles are published, this will show media relevancy for the campaign. Lastly, the campaign will also rely on increased faculty advocacy after media exposure to assess the success of this media tactic.

*Acceptance objective for shared media:*

Social Media and Video Content – To judge the impact of this media tactic, the evaluation phase of this campaign will measure watch time of short and long format videos on each social media platform. Furthermore, hashtag use, specifically from key publics, will be assessed to determine the adoption rate of the hashtags and campaign engagement through social media.

*Acceptance objective for paid media:*

Influencers and Ambassadors – To review the acceptance impact of this media tactic, comments expressing interest and/or support of the program will serve as the benchmark for success. Moreover, if there are inquiries from faculty requesting to be an ambassador after engaging with influencer/ambassador content, this will demonstrate achievement in advocacy efforts.

Action Objective

Possibly one of the most important objectives in this campaign's evaluation, the action objective, will assess whether key publics move beyond awareness and acceptance to direct participation in the desired action requested by the campaign. Encouraging faculty to promote Roar 2 Success and become advocates and ambassadors directly supports the program's long-term sustainability. By evaluating the number of faculty who take action, the campaign can determine if it effectively motivates key publics.

*Action objective for owned media:*

Bio Link – To determine the success of utilizing a bio link through the Replug platform in this campaign, metrics from Replug will assess click-through rate. This will help determine link clicks, visits, and time spent on linked pages. Additionally, QR code scans leading to the bio link will also be assessed to determine the success of integrating the QR code with the bio link.

QR Code – To evaluate the success of utilizing QR codes in this campaign, metrics from Replug will assess number of QR code scans across digital and print assets, unique vs. repeat QR scans, and the rate at which the QR codes lead to actions like website visits or student testimonials.

Roar 2 Success Website – To assess the success of updating the website to include sections that resonate with the key public, metrics from web analytics will assess page views to the website, time spent on website sections like student testimonials and Faculty FAQs, and web traffic source (whether traffic came from QR code, web search, social media, etc.)

Video Media– To measure the success of implementing student testimonials in this campaign, metrics from social media platforms like Meta Analytics and YouTube Analytics will assess total views and viewers, watch time, and audience engagement rates through likes, shares, and comments.

Presentations – To judge the success of campus presentations on the key public, the evaluation phase of the campaign will consider the number of faculty that engage with post-presentation materials (e.g., QR codes, visiting website, etc.)

Newsletter – To gauge the success of the monthly newsletter, website analytics will be utilized to evaluate the most clicked newsletter link and if there is a demand for a subscription-based newsletter. Additionally, Faculty and leadership call-to-action will be assessed (e.g., attending Roar 2 Success events, faculty ambassadorship for Roar 2 Success, etc.)

Data Report – To measure the success of reporting Roar 2 Success semesterly data to key publics, the evaluation phase of the campaign will monitor data report mentions or references in faculty and cabinet meetings (if possible) and campus reports and town halls. Additionally, the number of faculty that access the report will also be measured.

*Action objective for earned media:*

News Interview – To judge the success of both *The Buffalo State Buzz* and *Inside Higher Education* articles, the campaign will assess the number of article views, shares and faculty and leadership engagement with the articles (e.g., comments, shares, and reposts).

*Action objective for shared media:*

Social Media – To determine the success of the newly implemented social networking sites, audience engagement will be assessed (number of likes, comments, shares, and saves). Additionally, the quality of conversation in the comments will further determine effectiveness along with Faculty direct messaging concerning Roar 2 Success.

Video Sharing – To measure the success of implementing long and short format videos in this campaign, audience engagement will be assessed (number of likes, comments, shares, and saves), as well as referral traffic to the Roar 2 Success website.

*Action objective for paid media:*



Influencer Marketing – To assess the success of influencer marketing and ambassadorship in this campaign, conversion rate or the number of faculty that take interest in Roar 2 Success, after engaging with the content will be evaluated. Also, the number of direct messages and inquiries of faculty expressing interest in learning more about Roar 2 Success or seeking to become faculty ambassadors will also be considered.

### Final Evaluation

The final evaluation will be presented in report format to campus leadership. The report will then be shared with deans, chairs, faculty, and SUNY leadership to provide a complete assessment of the campaign's effectiveness. The report will be used to demonstrate the impact of the Roar 2 Success program on student success outcomes and justify continued and future increased institutional support based on data-driven insights.

Decision makers will require a high level of honesty to ensure transparency and informed decision-making, especially when providing feedback on success and areas of improvements. All in all, the evaluation will aim to highlight measurable outcomes, productive recommendations, and depict clear evidence of how the campaign influenced awareness, acceptance, and action among key publics.

### Evaluation Schedule

#### Implementation Report – Month 1-2: February – March

- Conduct initial survey to assess initial awareness and perception of Roar 2 Success
- Monitor early engagement metrics from owned and shared media
- Provide initial assessment of media tactics effectiveness and reach

#### Progress Report – Month 3-6: April – July

- Analyze mid-campaign engagement levels and influencer marketing impact
- Assess initial acceptance and action metrics
- Adjust campaign tactics if needed based on engagement and feedback

#### Final Evaluation – Month 7: August

- Conduct post-campaign survey to measure changes in awareness, acceptance, and action
- Compare survey results against initial benchmark to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign
- Present a final report to campus leadership, highlighting key findings and recommendations for future initiatives to support Roar 2 Success

## **Conclusion**

By leveraging compelling student narratives and strategic communication tactics, Roar 2 Success positions itself not just as another student support initiative, but vital to student persistence and retention at Buffalo State University. Through high impact storytelling, amplified by faculty preferred media channels and supported by measurable data, the program has the power to shift internal perceptions, create faculty and leadership advocates, and secure its place as an indispensable part of the university's student success ecosystem.

The public relations lesson found within this plan is that awareness is not just built on results, but on how those results are communicated. An initiative can be overlooked without intentional storytelling, identification of target internal audience, and internal public engagement. This public relations plan demonstrates the importance of shaping a distinct identity and delivering the right message to the right audience on the right media platform.

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## **Appendix A**

Appendix A: Survey Results, Data and Links

Title: *Roar 2 Success Campus Outreach (Deans/Chairs/Faculty)*

Date Administered: April 2025

Respondent Outreach: 100+

Respondents: 17 - Provost, Associate Dean, Department Chairs, and Faculty

Method: Anonymous online Qualtrics Survey

Survey Link: [https://buffalostate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_eVVnrMrbg4FgAlK](https://buffalostate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eVVnrMrbg4FgAlK)

Results Report: Included with Master's Project submission

Notes: Qualtrics results shows multiple breakdowns of each question. However, please see survey link for full list of survey question

## **Appendix B**

Appendix A: Focus Group Results, Data and Links

Title: *Roar 2 Success Campus Outreach (Focus Group)*

Date Administered: April 2025

Respondent Outreach: 48

Respondents: 6 – Faculty

Method: Zoom Video Meeting & Vevox Poll

Poll Results: Vevox.com, Session ID: 441-801-156

Results Report: Results from Focus Group Polls can be found on vevox.com at this Session ID: 441-801-156

Notes: Vevox Poll results may appear as skewed due to faculty technical error. (Personal notes were taken during Zoom meeting to offset technical error)