# Brand Messaging Guide

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I. BRANDING: A UNIVERSITY-WIDE STRATEGY TO BUILD OUR REPUTATION

OUR SITUATION

The good news:
The University of San Francisco delivers an education unlike any other. The combination of our world-class faculty, Jesuit values, and the unique spirit and resources of San Francisco are only available at USF. In addition, our students, faculty and university are receiving awards, grants, and high ratings from higher education experts as never before.

The challenges:
• Not enough people know about USF or this good news.
• Prospective students and supporters are experiencing communications overload from regional and national competitors who present an ever-growing array of academic programs and methods of delivery.
• We already send out thousands of communications—from news releases to direct mail appeals to e-communications to program open houses. “More of the same” will not cut through the communications clutter.

The mandate:
“Communicate USF’s distinctiveness among colleges and universities.” This is one of just seven strategic priorities set by our president and Board of Trustees. They have determined that reaching our strategically important audiences is crucial to fulfilling our mission in the future.
OUR STRATEGY: BRANDING

To respond to this mandate, we employ the proven strategy known as “branding.” We begin by naming our “distinctives”—those aspects of our students’ experience that set us apart from our competitors. In branding language, these are our differentiators. We will talk in depth about these in Section III (p7). Together they constitute a unique, favorable “position” relative to our competitors, a position we hope to instill in the minds of our target audiences.

Effective branding, then, is a sustained, university-wide strategy, using consistent messaging and visuals to elevate USF out of the higher education communications clutter and build the university’s reputation among audiences important to our future.

USE OF THIS GUIDE

Starting with a “Positioning Statement,” this guide explains how we can all work together to carry out this strategy. The guide covers both messaging guidelines and visual guidelines.

To help the university make best use of the guide and access our creative resources, the Office of Marketing Communications (OMC) was established in 2011. All academic and administrative units are served by one of OMC’s client managers who serve as partners in developing and implementing effective marketing communication plans.
II. POSITIONING STATEMENT

A clear and consistent brand is critical to connecting with key audiences in a meaningful way, creating emotional resonance, engagement, and loyalty. The end goal is to ensure that our audiences walk away knowing who we are, how we are different, and why we matter.

The following positioning statement has been developed to guide overall university messaging. It declares the position we want to occupy in the minds of all audiences, from prospective students to alumni to civic leaders. The statement is informed by major market research studies that identified the value benefits of the University of San Francisco that differentiate USF from its competitors. The positioning statement should be read as an umbrella statement intended to guide more tailored messaging.

“The University of San Francisco draws on the inclusive, progressive spirit of its hometown to provide students from all backgrounds with an education that is intensely personal, intellectually demanding, outcome oriented, and insistent on the capacity of every individual to make an enduring impact on the world.”

In other words, USF shows students how disciplined thinking can lead to enduring impact. Our graduates are equipped to be successful and inspired to do their part to change the world. USF and its students share the defining characteristics of the city of San Francisco—open-minded, adventurous, hard-working, innovative.

This is USF: Sharp minds, big hearts, and independent spirits.
III. DIFFERENTIATING MESSAGING CONCEPTS

The University of San Francisco has identified four differentiating messaging concepts that set it apart from competitors and developed specific language to describe each. These messages allow us to speak with one voice when communicating with internal and external audiences, ensuring that the USF brand is consistently, clearly, and compellingly conveyed.

The descriptions here are intentionally brief and general. The message names, especially The San Francisco Advantage, should be used uniformly wherever possible. However, messages describing experiences and achievements that illustrate the concepts will vary widely according to the particular academic and administrative unit as well as the target audience.
NOTES:  
USF’s San Francisco Bay Area location has proven to be the university’s strongest selling point across all audiences. Location should be framed around the city as an extension of campus, i.e. how a USF education reaches beyond the classroom to include internship, service learning, and other experiential learning and professional opportunities available in the city and region.

In addition, the San Francisco Advantage message ties into our mission: Getting an education at USF, in the city of San Francisco, uniquely prepares students to “change the world.” Because of the nature of the city—and because of USF’s special relationship with the city—our students gain the skills, values, and perspectives to work for positive change in a complex, diverse, and interconnected world. The same inclusive, progressive spirit that has long defined San Francisco is also a defining trait of USF. Living and learning in San Francisco means the real world isn’t “out there” somewhere—it’s right at our feet.

Differentiating Concept 1:  

**The San Francisco Advantage**

“University of San Francisco students, faculty, and alumni are integral participants in the entrepreneurial, innovative city of San Francisco and are engaged in everything from technology to nonprofits.”
Differentiating Concept 1: The San Francisco Advantage

Media Studies students learn about the SF art culture in a trip to the de Young Museum. USF is one of few to offer a Masters in Museum Studies.

Professor Corey Cook, director of the Leo T. McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good, arranges for internships in public service, including at City Hall.

Students interact with Bay Area broadcasters at a “Women in Broadcasting” seminar, among them CNN anchors, current professors and an NBC Bay Area investigative reporter.

Natalie Atkins ’13 bikes to an internship downtown. She is now a filmmaker in Colorado. San Francisco is home to many media companies, a rich resource for students.
Differentiating Concept 2:

**Engaged Learning**

“A USF education is intensely personal and intellectually demanding, emphasizing disciplined thinking and fostering transformative experiences.”

NOTES:
USF teaches students not just what to think but how to think. USF’s academic quality is defined by:
• **accessible faculty** to whom students feel accountable
• **broad academic choices**
• **intellectually demanding** academic and **service learning** experiences.
• **small class sizes**
• student **research** opportunities
• breadth of programming offered including USF’s broad, **interdisciplinary core** curriculum
• and **experiential learning** opportunities that reach into the city, the region, and the world

USF should also be identified as a **private and accessible** university, clearly distinguishing it from every other institution of higher education in the city of San Francisco. Private should be defined in a way that underscores the **inclusive, diverse** nature of our community as well as the academic benefits of **small classes and greater student-faculty engagement**.
Differentiating Concept 2: **Engaged Learning**

Professor Deneb Karentz, whose work investigates Antarctic ozone depletion, works with science students one-on-one.

USF's small class size and 16:1 student to teacher ratio gives students direct access to their instructors, who are leaders in their fields.

USF Media Technology class shows off their celebratory pocket protectors on a curation channel they created in the course.

Professor Wachtel and students help an international ecology team create a catamaran out of recycled plastic bottles that will sail to Australia.
Differentiating Concept 3:

**Equipped to Lead and Succeed**

“USF students graduate as broadly educated women and men with the professional skills needed to do well throughout their lifetimes.”

NOTES:

USF graduates are ready for everything. USF ensures that students graduate with market-ready competencies that allow them to thrive in their chosen career path. The undergraduate liberal arts core curriculum builds skills in critical analysis and communication that are always in demand and prepares graduates should they change jobs, or even whole careers during their lifetime.

Our students are prepared to be successful, effective leaders who are inspired to do their part to change the world.

This culture of success and leadership is at the heart of the USF enterprise. The university’s momentum is accelerating with innovative programs, new facilities, and a rising national profile.
Differentiating Concept 3: **Equipped to Lead and Succeed**

- **Alfred Chuang '82**, founder and CEO, Magnet Systems, and USF Trustee Emeritus, credits his undergraduate computer science education for much of his success.

- **Carlos Muela '09**, creator and owner of SOMA StrEat Food Park, a booming hangout spot featuring different food every week.

- **Aaron Horn, EdD '08**, opens doors for San Francisco’s youth at a guidance center in an underserved neighborhood.

- **Mark Massara, JD '87**, is the director of the Sierra Club’s Coastal Program and works tirelessly to protect coastal environments.
Differentiating Concept 4:

**Passion for Justice**

“The University of San Francisco community ignites students’ passion for social justice and the pursuit of the common good.”

**NOTES:**
USF’s commitment to social justice is informed by our 155-year-old Jesuit, Catholic mission. This message should emphasize that we are a community united around a deeply rooted mission to advance justice and we offer more experiences that heighten students’ awareness of social inequalities.

At USF, students are educated to be responsible global citizens in an increasingly interdependent world. USF applies scholarship to justice issues—thought with action—which in turn enhances academic quality. In the context of our tagline, messaging on this attribute should strengthen the internalized meaning of “here” as mind and heart, cultivated at USF in each student committed to social justice and the pursuit of the common good.
Differentiating Concept 4: **Passion for Justice**

USF has hosted 13 Nobel laureates, including the Dalai Lama in 2003.

USF immersion experiences such as Casa Bayanihan in the Philippines, have been great learning vehicles for social justice.

Nursing students have served as midwives in Guatemala for more than a decade.

Architecture students design a community center in class then build it in Nicaragua.
USF’s differentiating attributes should be expressed with a distinct and consistent personality—the face we show the world. The USF personality is that of a pragmatic idealist, a citizen of the world.

- Adventurous
- Hard-working
- Solution-oriented
- Independent spirit
- Dedicated
“Change the World from Here”

Change the World From Here is a call to action that is contemporary, urgent, and personal. It invites audiences to share the University of San Francisco’s mission of social justice in action by initiating change from Here.

The Here in this message carries three meanings:

1. As an invitation to change the world from San Francisco, the line showcases what research reveals as USF’s most recognized distinction: its intimate interconnection with the character and diversity of the city of San Francisco.
2. Here also means the campus, home to immersive learning experiences, pursuing a distinctive higher standard of academic excellence.
3. At its most personal, the line invites audiences to connect, as individuals, with University of San Francisco’s mission by engaging with the world through both mind and heart—the Here within.