

NOVEMBER 2005



# Crafting Skyline's Reputation

THE FRESH LOOK PROJECT

PRESENTED BY

*mission* minded

JENNIE WINTON : ZACH HOCHSTADT : TINE PIETSCHMAN

MARKETING COMMUNICATION FOR  
NONPROFITS AND OTHER DO-GOODERS

## INTRODUCTION

Mission Minded has worked under the leadership of President Victoria P. Morrow and direction of Sandy Irber of the Development, Marketing and Public Relations department to conduct a thorough strategic analysis of the public reputation of Skyline College.

Through the course of our work, Mission Minded has:

- Evaluated the many ways Skyline's reputation is enhanced or diminished through ongoing communications such as the visual identity, web site, print communications and the actual campus experience.
- Considered the quality, appearance and user friendliness of all communications and services of the college in order to make recommendations on marketing priorities.
- Considered the results of surveys conducted among Skyline leaders and students.

This document summarizes our findings and recommends a reputation that Skyline should strive to achieve in order to create a more accurate and appealing public image, one that will help Skyline attract more students and enhance their experience while enrolled.

A later deliverable will include specific tactical marketing recommendations.



**Strategic Analysis Process**

1. Discovery
2. Internal Brand Assessment
3. External/Focus Group Research
4. Recommended Positioning
5. Audit Communications
6. Outline Marketing Plan; Write Creative Brief
7. Develop Standards Manual

**PROCESS**

**Discovery** [Completed]

Mission Minded interviewed senior stakeholders at Skyline and reviewed existing communication materials and overall strategic objectives.

**Internal Brand Assessment** [Completed]

Mission Minded facilitated the Fresh Look Advisory Group in a work session to define priority “key descriptors” that reflect the qualities for which the group wishes Skyline to be known.

**External/Focus Group Research** [Completed]

Cathy Hasson, Skyline’s Director of Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness interviewed 62 students in seven groups that varied in age, ethnicity, education goal, enrollment status and interests.

**Recommend Positioning**

Based on internal and external research findings this document recommends the reputation Skyline should strive to achieve. The Fresh Look Advisory Group and others will consider recommendations and request refinement as necessary. Mission Minded will then submit a final document for wider distribution. Elements of this document include an analysis of key findings and recommended Core Attributes, Value Proposition, Brand Mantra, Positioning Statement and Tagline.

## PROCESS

### Strategic Analysis Process

1. Discovery
2. Internal Brand Assessment
3. External/Focus Group Research
4. Recommended Positioning
5. Audit Communications
6. Outline Marketing Plan;  
Write Creative Brief
7. Develop Standards Manual

### Audit communications

Based on reputation goals defined in the positioning stage, Mission Minded will audit existing communication materials and the campus experience, evaluating them against the approved Core Attributes and Positioning Statement.

### Outline Marketing Plan; Write Creative Brief

Based on audit findings Mission Minded will outline marketing priorities, including a tactical plan, and a creative brief that will drive the development of all new materials.

### Develop Standards Manual

Mission Minded will apply the creative brief to recommend standards for such ongoing communications as email footers, campus signage, catalogue, schedule and website.

## DISCOVERY FINDINGS

- Faculty and staff share a common view of the value and priorities of Skyline, primary among them that Skyline provides a high quality educational experience in a student-centered environment
- There is a pride among Skyline leaders about the quality of a Skyline education
- Faculty and staff assume that prospective students have negative feelings about Skyline including that it is “easy” as opposed to academically excellent
- In discussions about Skyline’s reputation and attributes, athletics were not mentioned by respondents
- Faculty and staff feel that, because it is a community college, Skyline suffers from a general lack of prestige
- Faculty and staff purport to offer students an experience that is welcoming supportive and warm, yet faculty and staff feel that the physical Skyline campus does not reflect these attributes
- Those interviewed felt that Skyline differentiated itself from City College by being a safe, gang-free, crime-free environment
- Those interviewed expressed the need for more communal / social space
- The campus does not have the feel of lively, vibrant community
- The cleanliness of the campus facilities is a concern to some
- The campus is difficult to navigate



## DISCOVERY FINDINGS

- Limited parking is a perceived challenge for students
- The Skyline logo is not considered meaningful or reflective of the Skyline experience and values
- Faculty and staff feel that the Skyline website, although technically functional, requires an overhaul in regards to its appearance, navigation and organization
- There is a lack of visual and message consistency across communications from different departments
- There is a lack of visual and message consistency across communications from sanctioned groups, clubs and activities
- Those interviewed felt that the school lacks good printed communication materials that effectively communicate about the college
- Acronyms and unclear language are common in publications and signage

## INTERNAL BRAND ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Pages 7–11 directly report the opinions of the Fresh Look Working Group from September 12, 2005.



### Top 6 Descriptors for how group wishes Skyline to be perceived:

- Excellent
- Welcoming
- Innovative
- Student-centered
- Opportunity
- Academically strong

### Other Descriptors deemed important, but less critical:

- Capstone
- Cultural/community center
- Transformational
- Diverse
- Vibrant
- Safe
- Inclusive
- Success
- Investment

## INTERNAL BRAND ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

### Competitors

- Other schools with same majors
- Schools with football teams
- Schools with accelerated/on-line tracks
- Stigma of community college
- Heald College
- Straight to work
- San Francisco City College
- San Francisco State University
- California State University – East Bay
- Other cosmetology/auto programs
- Foothill College
- De Anza College
- Cañada College
- University of Phoenix
- Devry University

## INTERNAL BRAND ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

### Features of Skyline

“Features” and “Benefits” are terms that are often confused with one another. Features are how you do your work. Benefits are the results and outcomes of your work. For example “small size” is a feature, while the related benefit is that students may have more personal access to teachers as a result.

#### Positives

- Small size
- Customer service
- Comprehensive community college
- Affordable
- Caring and nurturing
- Convenient
- Web accessible
- Diversity
- Talented faculty and staff
- Responsive
- Flexible
- Cultural and educational center of northern San Mateo county
- Centralized location
- Athletics
- Ethics
- Safety
- Feels like small liberal arts college
- Affordable
- One-stop
- Transfer program
- Honors
- English as a Second Language program
- Fog/weather

## INTERNAL BRAND ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

### Features of Skyline

10

#### Negatives

- Fog/weather
- Scheduling difficult
- Physical entry points
- Accessibility
- Lack of gathering place
- Quality of bookstore
- Intimidating offices
- Dilapidated/older buildings in disarray

## INTERNAL BRAND ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

### Benefits Identified From Features List

- Don't feel lost
- Increased student success
- Increased positive feelings
- For everybody/whole community
- Society benefits
- Preserves democracy
- Community and personal economic sustainability
- Student feels valued/important
- Builds self-esteem
- Makes world a better place
- Make people proud (parents, community of supporters)
- Discover talents
- Master skills
- Learn new traits
- Keeps you in class
- Better pay
- Increased participation
- Self-agency
- Ability to go on
- More confident

## EXTERNAL/FOCUS GROUPS FINDINGS

Pages 12–14 report Mission Minded's analysis of findings from Skyline student focus group interviews.

### Primary Reasons for Attending College

- Pathway to success
- Build self esteem
- Commitment to family/community, self or both

### Primary Reason for Choosing Skyline

- Convenience

(Convenience can mean proximity to home or work, time of class and/or available classes.)

### What Students Want From College

- Good teachers
- Accredited classes
- An environment that matches their social and academic goals
- A conducive learning environment
- Convenience
- Personalized guidance in selecting curriculum and setting goals
- Community

## EXTERNAL/FOCUS GROUPS FINDINGS

New students have low expectations of Skyline before attending. They assume it will meet their basic expectations of a college, but do not expect or appreciate the quality of education and services at Skyline until they have completed at least one semester. They choose Skyline because it is convenient to their home, work or both.

Some students expressed a willingness to drive further (experience less convenience) in exchange for:

- A preferred social situation (to be with or avoid classmates from high school)
- Having access to specific curriculum (classes or a certificate program)
- A convenient time at which class is offered

The details about the innovative projects and curriculum offered at Skyline are not what students search for initially; these are features, along with the quality of teaching and support, that contribute to students' favorable impressions of Skyline over time and the benefits they ultimately feel they receive from their Skyline education.

The diversity of race, ethnicity, age and academic interests is perceived as highly valuable by Skyline students. This was most often expressed, not as a benefit of feeling comfortable as in "people like me," but as an opportunity for students to experience and learn from people not like themselves. Again, not a feature actively sought by applicants, but one they are happy to experience once enrolled.

## EXTERNAL/FOCUS GROUPS FINDINGS

### Emotional Reasons for Seeking Community College Education

Students are emotionally driven to attend college because it increases their self-esteem through a combination of factors, including:

- Earning the respect of parents and/or community
- Achieving success in the face of academic challenge
- Earning respect by fulfilling the expectations of others that s/he should attend college
- Increasing self-esteem by reducing self/family's financial risks through increased earning potential

## CONCLUSIONS

### Target Audience

Due to limited marketing resources Skyline should focus its messages on those people most likely to be receptive to those messages, namely those people already considering attending community college. Messages should focus on raising the expectations of prospective students in such a way as to position Skyline as superior to other community college options.

Doing so will make Skyline the clear choice for two primary prospective groups of students:

1. Students who live nearby enough to consider Skyline the most convenient campus choice
2. Students in and beyond the immediate geographic area who are seeking the type of superior education and environment offered by Skyline

While the audiences of potential funders and the community-at-large are important to Skyline's success and standing, there is no need to devise distinct marketing strategies for these groups (other than fundraising communications). By focusing on student value and positioning Skyline as a superior community college, the message about Skyline's quality and excellence will be clear and understood by all.



## CONCLUSIONS

### The Skyline Reputation

Drawing from the emotional reasons that people have for attending community college, along with the features and benefits most appealing to Skyline's target audience, Skyline can build a reputation that will help it achieve its goal of attracting more students, donors and community support.

To reach its goals Skyline must raise awareness about what is most appealing about Skyline from the point of view of current students.

We recommend that Skyline actively work to associate itself with the following attributes:

Achievement	High Quality Education	Convenience	Welcoming	Opportunity	Encouragement
Accomplishment Success Brighter future Student centered Transformational	Credible Unique programs Innovation Student centered Vibrant Engaged High transfer rates Scholar awards Certificates that lead to jobs	Visible Local Accessible Student-centered Affordable	Diverse (ethnic, age and beyond) Openness Community-minded Transformative Safe Inclusive Small Student-focused	Student centered Innovation Brighter future On-campus options After degree options Find yourself Experiment	Student centered Assistance Faculty commitment The Learning Center Financial aid Counseling Foster student success Engaged Safe Supportive Nurturing

## CONCLUSIONS

### The Skyline College Value Proposition

The purpose of a value proposition is to gain clarity on what value is being offered in exchange for the price. In the case of Skyline the price is both the cost of tuition and the time invested in education relative to other pursuits such as employment or free time.

**Skyline delivers a great education that is convenient and at a price students can afford.**

This value proposition reflects what we know from research are the most important features of an education at Skyline from the point of view of both prospective and existing students. Using the words “great education” rather than “high quality education” makes the value proposition more authentically conversational and therefore believable as a fact rather than an empty claim. It provides the reassurance that Skyline is the place to invest yourself on the path toward fulfilling the emotional needs that drive the primary demand for community college.

## CONCLUSIONS

### The Skyline College Faculty and Staff Mantra

The mantra is a synthesis of the set of primary attributes. The purpose of a mantra is to act as an internal rallying cry for faculty and staff that keeps the focus on what is most important about Skyline from both an operational and communications point of view. The mantra is not an external marketing message. Skyline's approach to education, the environment in which it is offered and marketing materials should strive to convey the properties of the mantra.

### Excellent Education

What will be most distinguishing and appealing to students is the idea that Skyline is a high-quality education. Each student will have their own evaluation of what high quality needs to be for them, and the goal is to position Skyline as providing not just the baseline of accredited courses with good teachers, but an education that is superior.

## CONCLUSIONS

### **The Skyline College Faculty and Staff Mantra (cont.)**

This will not only serve to attract more students to Skyline, but will also increase loyalty to the college, and build overall community pride in the institution. Right now the fact that an excellent education can be had at Skyline is deeply buried beneath communications that do not highlight it and a campus environment that presents nearly the opposite image. Bringing excellent education out into the light for everyone to see – not just enrolled students who have experienced it–must be the primary force behind all Skyline efforts.

Skyline staff and faculty all see “student-centered” as a critical element in the way that they deliver services and educate Skyline students. We agree that “student-centered” is at the heart of the Skyline experience and is an integral part of the way in which Skyline delivers an excellent education.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Positioning Statement

Typically a positioning statement places a priority on highlighting a subset of the primary attributes based on current audience perceptions and competitive factors. In the case of Skyline, whose reputation among non-students does not include any of the desired attributes other than convenience, the positioning statement must highlight all of the six attributes. The positioning statement summarizes the reputation for which Skyline wishes to be known. Like the mantra, the positioning statement is an internal guide that should drive the focus of decision making from operations, to curriculum to marketing.

**Skyline College is a welcoming environment that supports my commitment to achieving a better life for myself; the college provides a convenient, great education at a price I can afford.**

This positioning statement addresses both the reasons a student drives himself to achieve education and reinforces the most practical and appealing features about Skyline. In their own words, this statement represents what Skyline hopes all students think of when they think of Skyline College.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Sample Taglines

A good tagline is short, descriptive, memorable and emotional. It embodies the attributes of the desired reputation and supports your positioning statement. Unlike the positioning statement and mantra, it is an external statement that helps communicate value and build your reputation.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Sample Taglines

**Skyline College:** Great Education. Great Expectations.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Sample Taglines

**Skyline College:** Getting You There.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Sample Taglines

**Skyline College:** My school. My future.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Sample Taglines

**Skyline College: Achieve.**

## CONCLUSIONS

### Next Steps

Since students who attend Skyline ultimately determine that Skyline is better than what they expected from a community college and feel very favorably toward it as a result, Skyline must work to demonstrate this excellence to applicants and prospective students. Improving the physical environment of the campus, and upgrading the print and electronic communications about the school can help achieve this. The next step in this process will be to develop a marketing plan that outlines specific strategies and tactics for bringing the new reputation to life.

We would also like to discuss the taglines in more detail with you. Although developing a new tagline for Skyline was not among our agreed-upon deliverables, we feel that one is needed, and we have proposed the four strongest from the dozens we wrote and considered.