

**THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA**

**Internal Audit Department**

**University External Relations Organizational Review**

**Issued: May 20, 2004**

**Distribution List**

David J. Skorton – President  
Steven Parrott – Director, University Relations  
Terry Johnson – University Controller  
Internal Audit Management Committee  
Board of Regents Office, State of Iowa  
Office of Auditor of State

## **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT**

### **University External Relations Organizational Review**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Office of University Relations (OUR), The University of Iowa Foundation, and the Alumni Association are units that traditionally have corresponded with alumni and other supporters of the University. During the past fifteen years, various colleges and other programs have created external relations positions that also have the responsibility to communicate with sponsors, alumni, and advisory boards directly related to the colleges or programs they represent. These external relations individuals report to the Deans or Directors of their respective college or program and also coordinate with OUR for all news media interaction and with some publications development. This proliferation of external relations positions is not unique to The University of Iowa. The vast majority of the fifteen peer institutions surveyed have experienced the same trend toward decentralization.

#### **PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

Internal Audit was asked to review the OUR and the organization of external relations units at The University of Iowa and compare the activity, interaction, and structure of our organization to peer institutions.

The purpose of the review was to identify the current:

- 1) Organizational structure.
- 2) Amount and source of financial support.
- 3) Amount and type of communication activity.
- 4) Overall responsibilities and activities.
- 5) Issues and concerns relating to the University's external relations environment.
- 6) Level of coordination between OUR and external relations units on campus.
- 7) Comparison of selected type of activities, level of coordination, and organizational structure to certain peer institutions.

To collect the information for this review, Internal Audit:

- 1) Interviewed nine individuals within OUR.
- 2) Interviewed 16 individuals with external relations responsibilities in collegiate and departmental units independent of University Relations.
- 3) Surveyed 15 peer institutions.
- 4) Reviewed the 2000 Lipman Hearne report "Strategic Communications Assessment" commissioned by former President Coleman.

Based on the work performed, Internal Audit would like to make the following recommendation.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. **Increase the interaction between OUR and the Collegiate External Relations Group (CERG).**

Based on the campus interviews, the survey of peer institutions, and recommendations from the Lipman Hearne report, the CERG and the OUR should create a more interactive relationship.

The majority of collegiate external relations personnel are looking to central administration for a coordinated University message and a focused marketing effort. This information could then be disclosed on a consistent basis in each individual collegiate publication.

The Lipman Hearne report recommended the University develop a “consensus-built positioning platform, with corollary supporting messages, to serve as the base for all unit communications.” To develop this, they encouraged central administration to engage individuals across campus in a “positioning platform” consensus building exercise.

The majority (9 of 15) of our peers surveyed convene regular meetings with their collegiate external relations groups. Two of the peers help develop the collegiate external relations staff through formal communication training programs.

The CERG was formed by the collegiate communicators to provide a forum for the sharing of information and ideas between departments whose experience, staffing, and amount of funding varies widely. The group currently meets once a month to discuss current issues, publication questions, and share ideas. The incorporation of the OUR into these meetings would present an excellent forum for the two groups to begin interacting and building a collaborative relationship. A long-term goal could be for the OUR to become more involved with the development and training of the CERG members.

#### Corrective Action by Management

The Director of University Relations will appoint the Coordinator of Special Projects and Outreach to meet on a monthly basis with the CERG to share information with CERG and to bring back to the OUR Director information, questions, and concerns expressed by the CERG. The OUR Director will attend at least one CERG meeting per semester and one meeting during the summer.

The OUR Director will continue keeping in touch with the CERG through regular e-mail communication of University news and initiatives.

The OUR Director will also re-instate twice-a-year meetings of the Strategic Communications Forum to specifically discuss current integrated marketing plans, including any new survey research supporting those plans, specific communications and advertising initiatives, and specific executions of those communications, such as recruitment ads for TV, radio, and print.

In FY05 in particular, the OUR Director will attempt to consult individually and /or collectively with the Deans of the colleges to learn more about their needs and

concerns regarding integrated marketing and a “consensus positioning platform” for the University. Those talks will attempt to specifically address whether the Deans have any concerns about how integrated marketing and communications plans may affect their autonomy.

*Individual Responsible* – Director, Office of University Relations  
*Target Date* October 2004

Auditor’s Comment – Internal Audit agrees with the corrective action and will follow up in the 2nd quarter of FY 2005 to see that the action has been implemented.

**SUMMARY**

Based on the information received, the external relations organization at the University of Iowa does not vary much from those of the peer group. As discussed in our recommendation, the collegiate relations personnel and the Office of University Relations should recognize each other as collaborators and actively coordinate the global University message. This collaboration will help increase the number and variety of individuals receiving that central message. Internal Audit will follow up on the implementation of the corrective action in the 2nd quarter of FY 2005.

  
Audit Manager  
Richard R. See

  
Director of Internal Audit  
Carol F. Senneff