

U turn: S.F. State changes name to juice donations

BY SARAH DUXBURY
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San Francisco State is dropping its U.

The move to rebrand itself as S.F. State is a bid to stand apart from the city's academic alphabet soup, whose flavors include USF, CCSF and GGU.

This new public identity comes at a time when the school must turn to its community to make up for lost state support, only it turns out that community doesn't know much about it.

"We are perceived as out here beyond a moat, and not part of San Francisco," said Lee Blitch, vice president of university advancement, who initiated the rebranding effort about a year ago. "But we are San Francisco."

Blitch said that S.F. State is central to the city's success. Last year, it graduated 8,000 students, and 80 percent of them stayed here to work. Fees remain a mere \$2,400 per year for full-time students, and 30,000 students are enrolled on a full- or part-time basis.

But with needs greater than the state budget can cover, the 107-year-old school needs a new revenue stream.

"We can eke by with state funding, but we can't do quality work without private support," Blitch said.

The old library needs a seismic upgrade. Sacramento has supplied enough money to build three floors—which would almost meet last year's demand, Blitch said. The flagship Creative Arts college needs a new home. The state has provided two-thirds of the funds, but S.F. State must raise \$30 million more. (Manny Mashouf, founder of Bebe and a State alum, has pledged \$10 million, the school's largest gift to date.) Private funds could also help build a new nursing school, a new gym and upgrade some of the campus' more dilapidated buildings.

Mind over marketing

By building pride and recognition with a new brand, Blitch expects revenue to follow.

S.F. State worked with Philippe Becker Design to make the brand reflect the different aspects of the university: its diversity and entrepreneurial streak, its commitment to social justice and innovation.



SPENCER BROWN

"We are perceived as out here beyond a moat, and not part of S.F.," Blitch says.

David Becker, the firm's president, said that universities are following corporate America's lead in understanding the importance of branding.

"Many universities abhor the idea of having to market themselves, but in the absence of marketing yourselves proactively, the market will define you and assign you values," he said.

A new logo ties together what S.F. State wants to communicate: its history, location and commitment to education. There's also a new tag line: State of Mind.

These will appear on all university signs, buses, communications and collateral. It will be on banners along major San Francisco corridors for the next year, as well as on a Market Street billboard. It's also on the new, blockbuster Westfield San Francisco Centre, where S.F. State will open its graduate business school Jan. 23.

'Emotional ask'

S.F. State wants to relocate from the far side of 19th Avenue to front of mind in public perception because lack of awareness has cost the school time and again. When the mayor announced a plan to harness tidal power from

underneath the Golden Gate Bridge, he never thought to engage S.F. State, which has a research facility devoted to studying the bay. Or there's the potential donor who thought he had already given to SFSU, when in fact the gift went to CCSF.

Such missed opportunities cost the school in both prestige and revenue.

"A lot of nonprofits and education organizations are finding new ways to appeal to donors in a changing fundraising market," said David Perry, a communications consultant who works with many nonprofits. "Making 'State' more of an emotional ask is a good thing."

On the horizon is the school's first annual campaign in years.

It undertook a half-baked giving campaign about three years ago, and under 1 percent of alumni contacted made a gift, Blitch said. Now, 15 percent of alums contacted by the school have pledged to give. As the new brand takes hold, Blitch expects that number to improve.

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