

# True Bruin Values

## Messaging Guide

A foundation for UCLA's storytellers

## Introduction

This guide is designed for communications and marketing writers and content producers at UCLA to assist with integrating the [True Bruin Values](#) into existing projects. As you create content, focus on identifying moments and narratives where these values manifest organically in the stories of our diverse community — students, staff, faculty, alumni, parents and the institution itself. Use these authentic examples to anchor your storytelling, showcasing how the values are reflected in everyday experiences and accomplishments across campus.

For background on the values refresh process, please visit the [True Bruin Values website](#).

## Refreshed True Bruin Values

The refreshed values were finalized after significant Bruin community input. Each value includes a brief principle statement and four behavioral statements that illustrate how the value is practiced daily, serving as guides for stories that reflect each value.

### Integrity

*Lead with character.*

#### Behavioral statements

- We communicate with honesty and transparency
- We make ethical decisions grounded in evidence and a commitment to truth
- We engage with openness and humility, especially when it is most difficult
- We take responsibility for our actions and their impact, individually and collectively

#### When writing toward Integrity

Start with facts that can be backed up. Provide evidence instead of just stating opinions. The most powerful integrity stories often highlight not only the achievements of individuals or organizations, but how they conduct themselves, make decisions and respond to challenges.

**Vocabulary anchors:** honest, transparent, accountable, evidence-based, principled, candid

### Excellence

*Strive for greatness.*

#### Behavioral statements

- We set the highest standards in teaching, research, and service
- We ask questions and challenge assumptions in pursuit of knowledge
- We collaborate to elevate quality and impact
- We direct our efforts toward the public good in Los Angeles, in California, and beyond

## When writing toward Excellence

Identify a specific achievement along with the individual or team behind it, and explain its importance to both the UCLA community and the greater world. General praise does not do justice to true excellence. Specific examples highlight accomplishments more effectively. Stories of success resonate deeply when they link to real-world impacts.

**Vocabulary anchors:** rigorous, specific, impact, public good, advancing, contributing

## Belonging

*Build community.*

### Behavioral statements

- We treat each other with mutual respect across differences
- We create inclusive environments for learning and collaboration through our daily actions
- We address bias or harm with accountability, care, and a commitment to repair
- We build bridges across differences in identity, role, and viewpoint

## When writing toward Belonging

Show the community through people and their relationships, not through descriptions of community as an abstract concept. Belonging stories work when they highlight how Bruins have brought people together, made others feel valued and fostered environments where people from all backgrounds can thrive.

**Vocabulary anchors:** community, across differences, bridges, mutual respect, inclusive practice, repair

## How to embed True Bruin Values into storytelling

Good storytelling illustrates True Bruin Values through actions. To guide your approach, ask yourself: *"Which value or values does this story naturally express?"* Most stories that come out of UCLA naturally express one or more values. Your job is to recognize the alignment, not invent it. If a story does not clearly embody any value, it might not be right for the True Bruin Values framework.

### When to make True Bruin Values explicit vs. implicit

**Make True Bruin Values explicit when** the audience needs to understand them as a framework (orientation materials, leadership communications introducing the values, awards and recognitions, internal training).

**Keep True Bruin Values implicit when** the audience needs to encounter the values in action (most external storytelling, student profiles, research features, social posts, campus news). The values are stronger when readers feel them rather than read them. You could consider using the phrase 'True Bruin' to describe someone embodying the values.

### **Laddering existing stories without retrofitting**

When an existing story naturally aligns with a value, lean into the language and framing that strengthen that connection; when it does not, leave it alone. Forced alignment is worse than no alignment at all. Readers can sense when language has been added to a story rather than emerging from it.

### **Cross-value storytelling**

Some stories or messages express more than one value. For example, a first-generation student researcher leading a project that improves community health can embody all three values. Highlight them naturally to enrich the story's authenticity and impact, without overemphasizing to flatten its complexity.

## **Tone and audience**

Keep tone and audience in mind when writing about the True Bruin Values. The core principles stay the same: be specific, be honest, let the work speak. Formality, context and the level of institutional voice may change depending on the audience.

### **Writing for students**

Direct, contemporary, conversational. Students respond to specificity and authenticity, and they recognize corporate-speak immediately. Use the names of student programs, student leaders and student work where possible. Avoid language that sounds like marketing.

### **Writing for staff**

Practical, respectful of time, grounded in shared experience. Staff communications work best when they recognize the day-to-day reality of campus operations and the people who run them.

### **Writing for faculty**

Substantive, evidence-driven, respectful of disciplinary expertise. Faculty communications work best when they treat the audience as collaborators rather than recipients of messaging. Cite specific research, programs or initiatives.

## **Vocabulary guidance**

### **Language that strengthens resonance**

**Specific verbs over abstract nouns.** Identified, built, taught, repaired, expanded, challenged, advanced. These verbs carry weight because they describe what someone actually did.

**Named people, places and work.** A specific faculty member doing specific work in a specific place reads more strongly than a generic "Bruin researcher."

**Concrete impact language.** How many people? What changed? What is now possible that was not before?

## How to use this guide alongside the True Bruin Values Design Style Guide

This Messaging Guide emphasizes the importance of language, tone, and storytelling alongside the [True Bruin Values Design Style Guide](#), which covers visual aspects such as identity, layout, color and typography. For impactful content, both guides should be used together to ensure cohesion.

Visuals should complement the messaging; striking images paired with vague language can dilute the brand's values. Similarly, specific and engaging text that does not adhere to the visual style can appear disjointed. Strive for a balance where both visual and verbal elements work harmoniously to reinforce the brand identity.

Remember, effective messaging and design work in tandem. Content that is clear and precise benefits from visuals that echo this clarity, while vague messaging can be undermined by over-stylized designs.

For resources, refer to the True Bruin Values Design Style Guide (embed URL) and the True Bruin Values asset library (embed URL) for typography, colors and templates.

## Questions, feedback or contributions

This guide is a living document. Contact StratComm at [info@stratcomm.ucla.edu](mailto:info@stratcomm.ucla.edu) with questions, suggested examples or proposed updates.

## APPENDIX:

### I. Templates

Proposed messaging you may use in and adapt for your own communications and audiences:

#### **Leadership message:**

Our True Bruin Values reflect the principles that unite us as one Bruin community: Integrity, Excellence and Belonging. These values guide how we work with one another, support our students and colleagues, and advance UCLA's mission. They are commitments we make every day to foster a culture of collaboration, trust and purpose as we carry out UCLA's mission. Learn more about the values and how they shape our community at [TrueBruin.ucla.edu](https://TrueBruin.ucla.edu).

#### **Web blurb and/or newsletter footer:**

At UCLA, our values guide how we — faculty, students and staff — show up for ourselves, for one another and for UCLA's mission of education, research, healthcare and public service in Los Angeles, in California and beyond. Our True Bruin Values are Integrity, Excellence and Belonging. Learn more about the values and how they shape our community at [TrueBruin.ucla.edu](https://TrueBruin.ucla.edu).

### II. Case studies

Two annual campaigns that have run for years, each showing how alignment with True Bruin Values shapes the storytelling. These are illustrative, not prescriptive.

## Case study 1: Back to School/True Bruin Welcome: Belonging

**Campaign context:** Annual welcome campaign for new and returning students, led by Student Affairs with amplification through StratComm-owned and other campus partner channels. The campaign coincides with move in, the first week of the fall quarter and a range of orientation experiences.

**Values alignment:** True Bruin Welcome is one of the most natural **Belonging** moments at UCLA. The campaign exists to help new students feel welcomed into a community they have not yet experienced, and returning students to reinforce their belonging on campus. Excellence is also conveyed through framing UCLA as the top institution that students have worked hard to join.

**Storytelling choice:** The campaign succeeds when it shows the community through the experiences of new and returning students themselves, rather than describing the community as an idea. Student voices, named programs, specific traditions and recognizable campus places do more to convey welcome than general language. Stories should help students of all backgrounds recognize themselves in UCLA, and they should signal UCLA's inclusive practices and programs for diverse students. The values land most clearly where the storytelling shows the work of bridging across differences in identity, roles or backgrounds.

**What this case shows:** A campaign that has run for years can be strengthened by approaching it through the values lens without changing its fundamental shape. Storytelling does not need to mention the values explicitly, but the work is in the storytelling choices.

## Case study 2: Commencement: Excellence and Belonging

**Campaign context:** Annual celebration of the graduating class, anchored by the main College Commencement ceremony in mid-June and amplified across owned channels, paid media and earned media. The campaign celebrates student achievement, surfaces alum stories and marks the institutional milestone of welcoming a new class into the Bruin alum community.

**Values alignment:** **Excellence** comes through the recognition of student and faculty achievement that the ceremony represents. **Belonging** comes through the graduating class joining the global Bruin alum community, and through the institutional commitment to celebrate their distinct paths.

**Storytelling choice:** Commencement storytelling is at its strongest when it surfaces specific student stories, named faculty contributions, and the public-good dimension of the work the graduating class has done and will go on to do. The **Excellence** behavioral statements provide direction: stories that connect rigorous student work to its real-world consequences carry more weight than general celebrations of achievement. The **Belonging** dimension comes through when the storytelling honors the range of paths Bruins have taken to graduation, ensuring graduates of every background can see themselves in the story being told about their class.

**What this case shows:** When two values are equally in play, neither needs to dominate. **Excellence** provides the substantive direction (named work, named impact). **Belonging** provides the inclusive frame (every graduate is recognized, every path is honored). The combination produces messaging that combines both the achievement and the community.