

From “I Am” to “We See You”: Transforming Student Voices into Recruitment Personas

Excellence in Marketing Award Nomination – UPCEA MEMS

At Mississippi State Online, we believe that effective marketing begins with authentic understanding. Our award-nominated initiative, *From “I Am” to “We See You,”* is a powerful example of how listening to students can lead to more meaningful engagement and inclusive outreach.

The foundation of this project was a unique component of our online orientation: “I Am” statements. These self-reflective declarations, written by real students, offered honest insights into their identities, goals, and motivations. From statements like “I am a first-generation college student,” “I am returning to finish what I started,” or “I am balancing work, kids, and school,” we identified recurring themes that represent the wide range of learners we serve.

Rather than viewing this content solely as an orientation activity, our team recognized its potential as a strategic marketing asset. We systematically analyzed hundreds of these statements to surface patterns, challenges, and aspirations. From that analysis, we developed a set of authentic, research-informed personas that now guide our recruitment messaging, advertising copy, creative direction, and campaign segmentation.

This process has enabled us to shift from generalized messaging to a more tailored, student-centered approach that resonates deeply with our prospective learners. Each persona reflects a lived experience, grounded in the actual voices of our students, and allows us to say not just “we understand you,” but “we see you.”

By transforming student-generated reflections into actionable marketing tools, this project bridges the gap between orientation and outreach, empathy and enrollment. It exemplifies the impact of cross-functional collaboration between student services, instructional design, and marketing.

This innovative approach has not only enhanced the relevance and inclusivity of our campaigns but has also contributed to increased engagement metrics and more meaningful connections with prospective students.

Through *From “I Am” to “We See You,”* we’ve demonstrated that when students speak, we’re listening, and responding with purpose.