

# Effective Advertising Strategies for Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs

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## **Abstract**

Online learning is becoming a more prominent method for students of all ages to expand their knowledge, acquire transferable skills, and earn credit, degrees and other credentials. Because of the increasing importance of online education, my research is focused on discovering which advertising strategies are most effective in attracting prospective students' attention for a specific form of online education, Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs. The paper first compares online advertisements for various types of college programs including Traditional On-Campus, Online, and Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs to get a holistic scope of the general online marketing landscape for higher education. Then, online advertising efforts currently being undertaken by institutional leaders that have successful Non-Degree Single Course College Programs are studied at depth. Prior academic research in the fields of marketing and education are then cited and discussed to add validity to the analysis. Ideas regarding persuasive, inspirational, and informative ads are compared. In addition, theories regarding brand reputation and market segmentation are discussed. Finally, an experiment utilizing Facebook Ad Manager is undertaken to test different styles of ad messaging and imagery. The overall conclusion of the experiment is that inspirational advertisements are the most effective form of online advertising for Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs.

## Introduction

The focus of this paper is to study the marketing of Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs, but in order to better understand this program type it is best to first view higher education from a “big picture” perspective. Therefore, the focus of this first section is to examine three types of programs in higher education: Traditional On-Campus, Online, and Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs. All program types utilize online advertising strategies to share their message and attract the attention of prospective students. In this section, I will present the online advertisements presented by the three respective program types and how their messaging, general themes, and imagery compare. This analysis will give a holistic view of the higher education landscape and allow the conclusions about Non-Degree Online Single Course College Programs found later in the paper to be better understood.

The advertising approaches taken by Traditional On-Campus, Online, and Non-Degree Online Single Course College Programs are unique. My research of this landscape has found that the Traditional On-Campus advertisements first and foremost focus on the rankings of the university. These stats are important to prospective students as verified by UCLA’s The American Freshman Report which reveals “that the primary university selection criteria is ‘academic reputation’ which is closely followed by the belief ‘this college’s graduates get good jobs” (Eagan). The Traditional On-Campus advertisements definitely hone in on these ratings the most compared to the other program types. In addition, Traditional On-Campus advertisements uniquely use the university mascot in most of their ads. This “brand image” most directly relates to audience members who are interested in attending the university property and getting involved with the social scene across campus. Specific program and individual student achievements are also highlighted in these advertisements in an attempt to make the prospective student envision themselves being successful at the university. This phenomena was researched in the journal article “University and course choice: Implications for positioning, recruitment and marketing” in which Maringe Felix, of University of Southampton concluded that “Issues of institutional prominence maintain a fairly high profile in students' decision-making...of critical importance is the overall reputation of the institution and staff credentials”.

Similar to the Traditional On-Campus advertisements, the Online Program advertisements also highlight program success by sharing rankings. In addition, the Online Program advertisements take an informative approach by posting details about program stats and tips for online learners. Motivational advertisements linked to graduation are the most prevalent in the Online Program section. These ads show prospective students that graduation is in sight and inspire online students to keep going. This extra boost of motivation is probably especially important for an online learner who doesn’t have the “campus buzz” to keep them engaged. The advertisements also uniquely address different student demographic groups. For example, an entire ad is dedicated to debunking myths about adult students returning to school.

Out of all the program types, the Non-Degree Single Course Online College Program has the most informative ads. These informative ads are especially critical for this program type as many people don’t even know that this educational category exists. Similar to the Online Program advertisements, these ads also spark motivation by sharing tips for success and program features that will help students on the road to victory. Additionally, these advertisements exclusively

focus on specific courses. Again, this is an especially important approach since these programs are selling a specific course and not a degree. Later in this paper, four universities that offer Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs will be examined and compared. Those universities are: University of Florida, University of Texas at Austin, Louisiana State University, and University of Wisconsin.

## Traditional On-Campus Advertisements



Figure 1-1



Figure 1-2



Figure 1-3

Figures 1-1, 1-2, and 1-3 represent advertisements that expound upon university-wide accomplishments. These advertisements cite high rankings in various academic standards granted by reputable sources such as The New York Times, US News, and Kiplinger's. When prospective students see these ads they will most likely be attracted to the institution and feel that they can trust the university to provide them with a solid education.



**Figure 1-4**



**Figure 1-6**



**Figure 1-5**

**Figure 1-4** represents a specific program achievement attained by the University of Texas – Austin’s researchers. In addition, the advertisement connects the university’s achievements with pop-culture, further enhancing the advertisement’s success with the prospective audience. The ad utilizes the power of social media by creating a fun, interesting piece of information that UT Austin students and alumnae can share with non-UT family and friends who could potentially turn into new UT Austin students.

**Figure 1-5** proclaims the academic accomplishments of the physics research department at LSU. This ad will be specifically impactful on students who are interested in studying physics, who may or may not know about LSU’s cutting-edge physics department. Unlike Figure 1-4, this ad is directly targeting the prospective student audience, not the current LSU student body/ alumnae network.

**Figure 1-6**, similar to 1-4 and 1-5, represents another program achievement. In this case, University of Wisconsin is congratulating their Higher Education Administration team. This is a persuasive piece of information for any student interested in attending the University of Wisconsin.



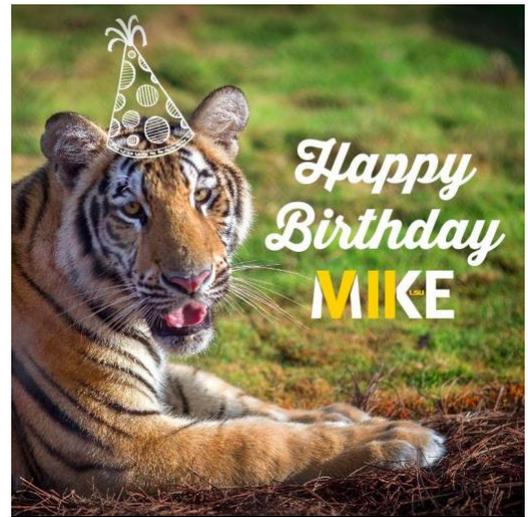
**Figure 1-7**



**Figure 1-8**



**Figure 1-9**

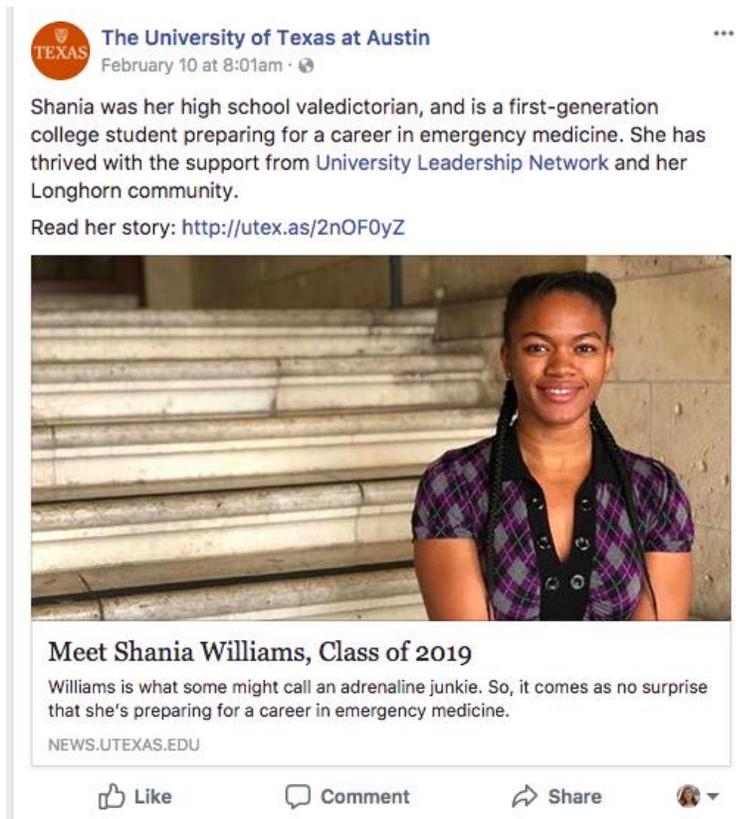


**Figure 1-10**

**Figures 1-7, 1-8, 1-9, and 1-10** all represent university mascots. These images are the brands associated with each university. The power of university branding is strong. Most people can identify a university based upon the mascot even if they don't attend the university. This type of advertising and branding is especially important for Tradition On-Campus programs, as much of the campus-life is connected to specific mascot imagery.



**Figure 1-11**



**Figure 1-12**



**Figure 1-13**

These advertisements all focus on current and previous student achievements. For example, **Figure 1-11** is targeted to the newest students getting ready to join the University of Florida in the fall. This is an interactive advertisement as students get to apply the effect to their own photos and post them to their Facebook pages. Similar, to Figure 1-4 this ad harnesses the power of social media by spreading the awareness of UF.

**Figure 1-12** focuses on a specific student story and how they are making the most of their University of Texas experience. This ad should be encouraging for prospective students as they look for a university that they can grow and develop with.

**Figure 1-13** focuses on an LSU alumna who has accomplished much since her graduation from LSU. This ad shows the audience that LSU grads go far and encourages them that they can do the same if they attend LSU.

## Online Program Advertisements



Figure 2-1

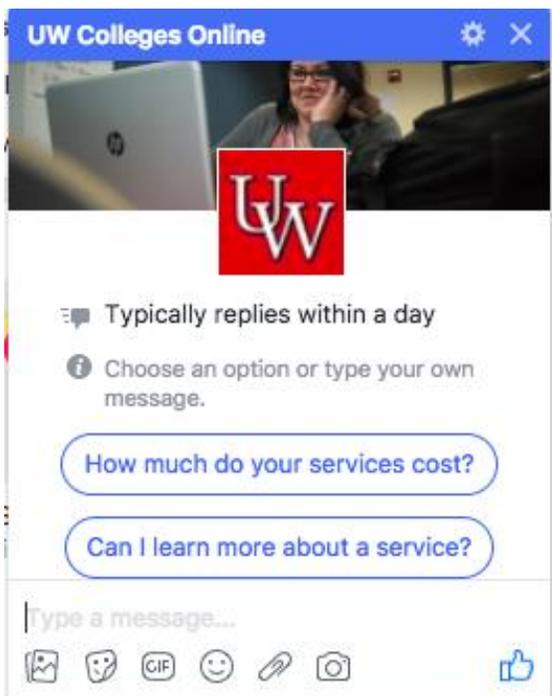


Figure 2-3



Figure 2-2

Similar to some of the Traditional On-Campus advertisements, **Figure 2-1** presents the program achievements awarded to UF Online. This ad portrays the fact that the Online Program is growing successfully based on high rankings from a trusted source- US News.

**Figure 2-2** shows prospective online students that they don't have to miss out on social activities. The ad sends the message that even online students can connect with fellow students and take part in sports viewing.

**Figure 2-3** represents a unique marketing feature of online programs. When one first goes to the Facebook page of a university's online program a pop up box, similar to the one pictured, is displayed. This feature is not only informative, but also comforting for prospective online students as they are witnessing the university's ability to provide support from a distance.

**LSU** February 5 at 10:43am · 🌐 Like Page

Earn a graduate certificate in Data Analytics from a Research I university. Inquire now.



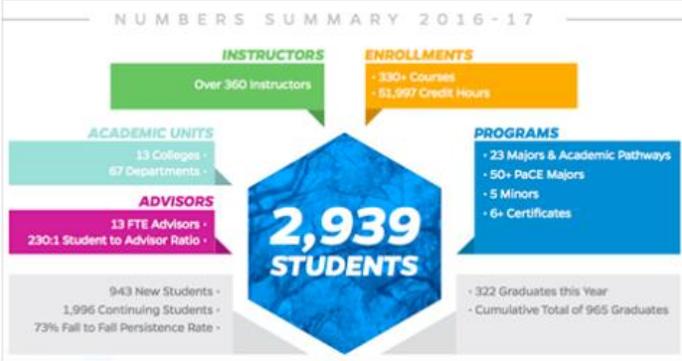
**LSU Online Programs**  
Join the Tiger family.

LSU.EDU Learn More

**Figure 2-4**

**University of Florida Online** January 4 · 🌐

Ever wondered who UF Online is comprised of? Check out some of these stats from our annual report! We launched in 2014, and with this past semester, more than 1,000 students have now earned their UF baccalaureate degree fully online. #NationalTriviaDay



**NUMBERS SUMMARY 2016-17**

- INSTRUCTORS**: Over 360 Instructors
- ENROLLMENTS**: 330+ Courses, \$1,997 Credit Hours
- ACADEMIC UNITS**: 13 Colleges, 67 Departments
- ADVISORS**: 13 FTE Advisors, 230:1 Student to Advisor Ratio
- PROGRAMS**: 23 Majors & Academic Pathways, 50+ PaCE Majors, 5 Minors, 6+ Certificates
- STUDENTS**: 2,939
- GRADUATES**: 943 New Students, 1,996 Continuing Students, 73% Fall to Fall Persistence Rate, 322 Graduates this Year, Cumulative Total of 965 Graduates

Like Comment Share

**Figure 2-5**

**UW Colleges Online** January 17 at 4:00pm · 🌐

Looking to start spring semester off on the right foot? Consider some of these tips!



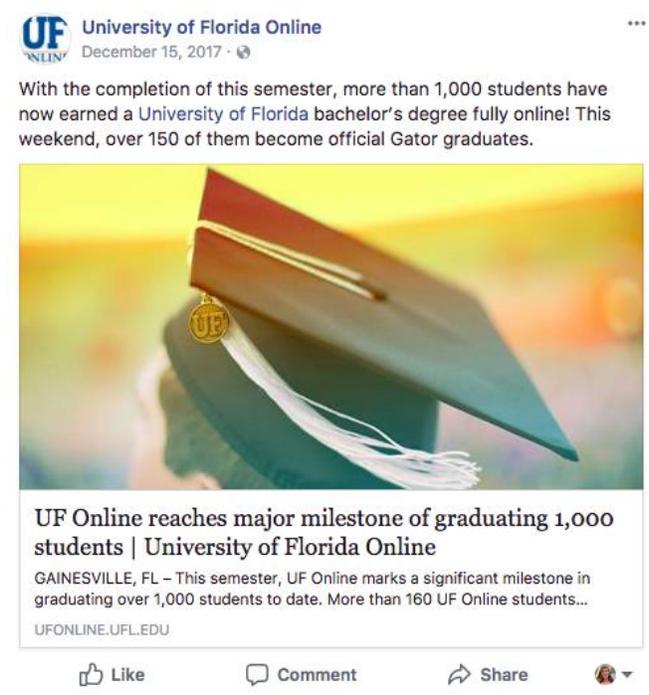
**Starting The Semester Right | University of Wisconsin Colleges Online**

Offers web based classes covering broad range of courses such as English, Geography and Maths which can lead to an associate's degree.

ONLINE.UWC.EDU

**Figure 2-6**

**Figures 2-4, 2-5, and 2-6** represent informative advertisements that provide the audience with useful facts about the university's online program. They ease the minds of prospective students by showing that other students, in similar situations as the prospective student, are successfully completing the online programs, even though these programs are a non-traditional form of education. For example, **Figure 2-4** gives a link to all the LSU Online Programs and features a specific certification. **Figure 2-5** features an infographic about the UF Online Program, providing students with information such as the student to advisor ratio. **Figure 2-6** sets up prospective and current online learners up for success by delivering a list of tips.



**Figure 2-7**



**Figure 2-8**



**Figure 2-9**

Figures 2-7, 2-8, and 2-9 present motivational advertisements that speak to different prospective student groups.

Figure 2-7 speaks to both enrolled and prospective students. The ad encourages both groups that graduation is in reach and that numerous online students have already attained this accomplishment.

Figure 2-8 mainly is directed to perspective students who are ready to make the move from “wishing to doing”. This simple quote is very effective due to the power of inspirational advertising, which will be explored later in this paper.

Finally, Figure 2-9 is directly targeted towards adult students. This ad addresses the concerns these students may have about returning to school and encourages them to reconsider these myths.

**UF ONLINE** University of Florida Online  
February 6 at 11:30am · 🌐

Unearth the foundation of your future—sign up for tomorrow's online info session about our geology, geography, and environmental management majors: <http://bit.ly/2DqTgqw>



Like Comment Share

**Figure 2-10**

**UF ONLINE** University of Florida Online  
7 hrs · 🌐

It's more than just an education—it's a higher calling. Join us for a webinar tomorrow and learn about becoming a Gator: <http://bit.ly/2mGJ5UG>



Like Comment Share

**Figure 2-12**

**UW** UW Colleges Online  
January 12 · 🌐

POP Quiz: UW Colleges Online offers hybrid lab classes that allow students to take certain science courses that would not otherwise be able to be taken online. The classes are part online lecture and part in-person learning experiences conducted over two weekends on a UW Colleges campus. Name one of the hybrid lab classes being offered in Spring Semester.

Two winners will be randomly selected from the correct answers on Tuesday, 1/16 and will receive a UW Colleges Online t-shirt.



Like Comment Share

**Figure 2-11**

**Figures 2-10, 2-11, and 2-12** are promotional advertisements that generate interest in specific courses offered by online programs. For example, **Figure 2-10** presents an ad targeted towards geology, geography, and environmental management majors. **Figure 2-12** is more general and targets all prospective online students. Both **Figures 2-10 and 2-12** promote webinar sessions for students to learn more about the program.

**Figure 2-11** represents a unique way for the university to connect with online students. A “pop quiz” is given to generate interest in the hybrid lab classes. This ad generates interest and awareness from all angles. Students participating in the challenge will learn something about the program and winners will receive a UW Online Program t-shirt which, when worn, will further promote the program.

## Non-Degree Single Course College Program Advertisements



Figure 3-1



Figure 3-2

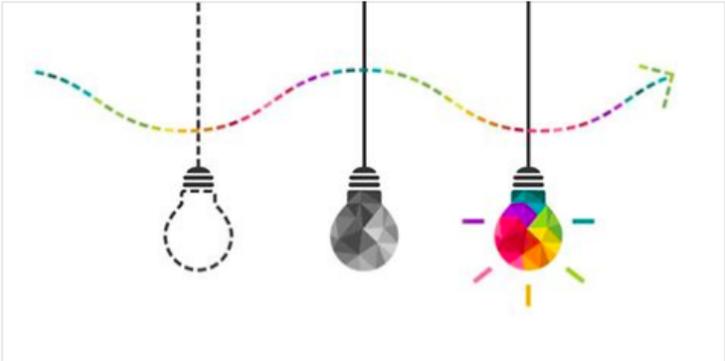


Figure 3-3

Figures 3-1, 3-2, and 3-3 represent various ways that universities inform the audience about Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs. These ads present characteristics of the program such as the opportunity to “finish up last minute degree requirements” (Figure 3-1), the “affordability and convenience” of the program (Figure 3-2), the “open registration” (Figure 3-2), and the “less stressful pace” (Figure 3-3).

**University Extension (UEX) – The University of Texas at Austin**  
 January 19 at 5:06pm · 🌐

STARTING MONDAY - Sociology of Creativity is an upper-division course that provides an introduction to varying aspects of creative insights, human consciousness and social processes. Check it out and register at: <https://courses.extension.utexas.edu/.../sociology-creativity...>



**University Extension (UEX) – The University of Texas at Austin**  
 College & University

Like Comment Share

Learn More

**Figure 3-4**

**LSU Distance Learning Programs**  
 September 22, 2017 · 🌐

Looking for an upper-level course in an interesting topic? SOCL 4521 Sociology of Gender is now available online. Enroll now.

Like Comment Share

2

Write a comment... 🗨️ 📷 GIF 🗨️

**Figure 3-6**

**University of Florida Flexible Learning**  
 February 7 at 12:10pm · 🌐

AMH 2010: United States to 1877 is a 3 credit history course focusing on American History from the colonial origins of the modern-day United States through the Civil War and Reconstruction Era. Course syllabus: [http://flexible.dce.ufl.edu/.../docume.../amh-2010\\_syllabus-.pdf](http://flexible.dce.ufl.edu/.../docume.../amh-2010_syllabus-.pdf)

Having trouble understanding some terms and concepts of the Reconstruction Era? Check out this short crash course video. #UFlex <https://www.youtube.com/watch...>

**Reconstruction and 1876: Crash Course US History #22**  
 In which John Green teaches you about Reconstruction. After the divisive, destructive Civil War, Abraham Lincoln had a plan to reconcile the country and make...

YOUTUBE.COM

Like Comment Share

**Figure 3-5**

**Figures 3-4, 3-5, and 3-6** present course-specific ads.

The advertisements in **Figures 3-4** and **3-5** describe the course in detail. In addition, **Figure 3-5** provides information about “crash course” resources that can help students excel in their courses. The ad in **Figure 3-6** takes a different approach by just providing a short, call to action.



**Figure 3-7**



**Figure 3-8**



**Figure 3-9**

**Figures 3-7, 3-8, and 3-9** are all motivational advertisements.

**Figure 3-7** provides an encouraging way to start of the week and inspires the student to prepare themselves for their coursework.

**Figure 3-8** not only motivates, but also informs students about the interaction they will have with professors and advisors even though they are taking their courses from a distance.

**Figure 3-9** is an encouraging message to current and prospective students regarding the payoffs of success.

## **An Introduction to Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs**

The remainder of my research is focused only on the Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs and how they fit into the digital marketing landscape for Higher Education solutions. Specifically, I will observe how four premiere universities attract and inform students about their Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs through their marketing efforts. The four universities I have selected are: University of Florida, University of Texas, Louisiana State University, and University of Wisconsin.

I have further narrowed my focus to only consider their use of Facebook and their individual program websites.

These courses are online and open enrollment. It is the “al a carte” of college education. The student can take any course, starting at any time, and they can work at their individual pace. Most courses must be completed within a certain period of time usually spanning between 16 to 52 weeks, but the student can choose to work much faster if they desire. Official admission to the university is not required and in most cases, official transcripts are provided after completion of the course so the credit can be easily transferred to other institutions.

These individual courses are perfect for 1) current college students, enrolled in any university who are “facing closed sections, missing graduation requirements, or looking to get ahead” (UF Flexible Learning). They are also very beneficial for 2) individuals who are seeking to return to college to complete the degree they started long ago. The final group is made up of 3) individuals who seek to increase their knowledge of a particular subject with no interest in pursuing a degree. Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs uniquely satisfy the needs of all three groups.

## Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs' Stats

University of Florida<sup>1</sup>

**Program Name:** Flexible Learning

**# of Courses:** 43

**Enrollment:** Open

**Time for completion:** 16 weeks

**Transcript:** Available

**Tuition In-State:** \$212.71 per credit hour

**Tuition Out-of-State:** \$248.07 per credit hour

University of Texas at Austin<sup>2</sup>

**Program Name:** University Extension

**# of Courses:** 37

**Enrollment:** Open

**Time for completion:** 5 months

**Transcript:** Available

**Tuition In-State:** \$850 per course

**Tuition Out-of-State:** \$850 per course

Louisiana State University<sup>3</sup>

**Program Name:** Online Distance Learning

**# of Courses:** 100

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<sup>1</sup> <http://flexible.dce.ufl.edu/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://extension.utexas.edu/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.outreach.lsu.edu/Distance-Learning/Online-Distance-Learning>

**Enrollment:** Open

**Time for completion:** 6 months

**Transcript:** Available

**Tuition In-State:** \$184 per credit hour

**Tuition Out-of-State:** \$184 per credit hour

University of Wisconsin<sup>4</sup>

**Program Name:** Independent Learning

**# of Courses:** 100

**Enrollment:** Open

**Time for completion:** 12 months

**Transcript:** Available

**Tuition In-State:** \$981 per course

**Tuition Out-of-State:** \$981 per course

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<sup>4</sup> <https://il.wisconsin.edu/>

# Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs' Facebook Advertisements University of Florida Flexible Learning



Figure 4-1



Figure 4-2



Figure 4-3

**Figures 4-1, 4-2, and 4-3** from UF Flexible Learning are all focused on helping students get the most out of their Non-Degree Single Course Online College Program experience. These ads can be helpful for students who are already in the program, as well as students who are considering using the program. For current students, the information presented in the ads can be useful as they study and attempt to effectively manage their time. For prospective students, the ads can be persuasive because the information presented makes online learning look feasible. These simple tips can easily turn a questioning student into an active online learner.

**Figure 4-1** has the most direct call to action – “Enroll in a Flex Course now...”. Even though **Figures 4-2** and **4-3** don't have prominent call to actions, they still present an indirect promotion of Flexible Learning. Prospective students who see these ads will most likely be happy to receive the unexpected study tips and will trust UF Flexible Learning to be a suitable educator since they have already demonstrated their ability to go above and beyond through their advertisements.



Figure 4-4



Figure 4-5

**Figures 4-4** and **4-5** emphasize the term “Gen-Ed courses”. UF Flexible Learning wants students to know that this program is specifically designed for completing these basic requirements. **Figure 4-5** illuminates this point by showing that Flexible Learning isn’t trying to compete with a student’s home university, but instead helping the student efficiently progress their education so that they can get to the classes in their major more quickly.

The infographic in **Figure 4-4** makes the entire process of taking a Flexible Learning course digestible and easy to understand, causing students to easily be persuaded to start classes soon.

University of Florida Flexible Learning added 2 new photos. **October 30**

Government is important - whether it's past, present or future. This is a government course. Enroll now to learn how the U.S. government works, and you know, get Gen-Ed credit towards your degree as well. [info.distance.ufl.edu/FlexibleLearning](http://info.distance.ufl.edu/FlexibleLearning)

**POS 2041**  
American Federal Government

**American Federal Government**

Credit: 3 Hours  
GenEd: S  
Writing Req.: None

This course is designed to survey topics that are vital for an understanding of American national politics and government. Readings and videos will examine the structural foundations, institutions, citizen-government linkages, and processes that characterize the American political system.

Figure 4-6

University of Florida Flexible Learning added 2 new photos. **September 19**

Math. Some dread it; some love it. Regardless of how you feel about it, most degrees require some sort of mathematics credit. We offer math classes like Basic College Algebra online. Instead of taking it in-person during the semester and giving up a core class for your major, register now to take it online.

For more info and to register, visit: [flexible.dce.ufl.edu/courses](http://flexible.dce.ufl.edu/courses)

**College Algebra**

**MAC 1105**

**College Algebra**

Credit: 3 Hours  
GenEd: M  
Writing Req.: None

This course deals with solving inequalities, linear, and quadratic equations; complex numbers; polynomials; graphs; rational functions; logarithmic and exponential functions.

Like Comment Share

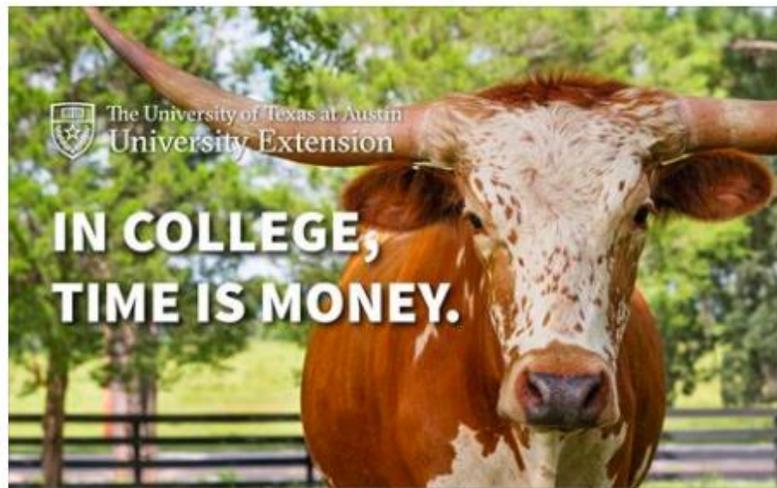
Figure 4-7

Figures 4-6 and 4-7 represent UF Flexible Learning's course specific advertisements. These ads succinctly describe the course material, the reason for taking the class, and a call to action. Again, the ads highlight language such as "Gen-Ed credit" and illustrate the importance of getting these required courses done quickly so that students can focus on their major.

## The University of Texas at Austin - University Extension



We know that in college, your time is money. Stay on track to graduate in 4 years with our self-paced online courses, take them anytime, anywhere!



University Extension (UEX) - The University of Texas at Austin

Learn More

College & University

Figure 5-1



Our Spring 2018 courses are now posted and open for registration. UEX courses can help you fill the gaps in your schedule and stay on track to graduate in four years. #UT18 #UT19 #UT20 #UT21



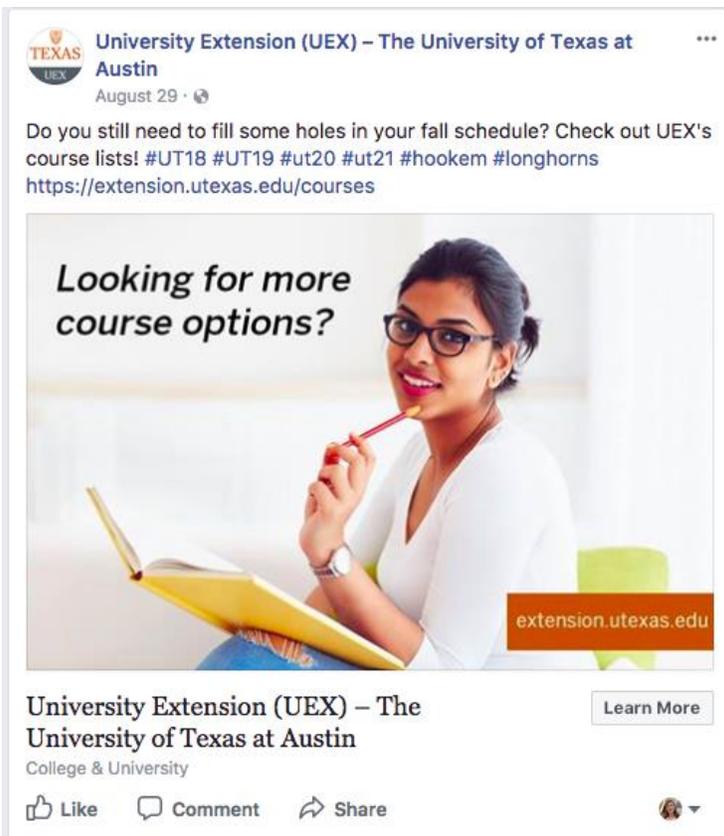
Online French, Latin, Russian and Spanish Courses

Evening Sections of Pre-med Chemistry Courses

Like Comment Share

2 Shares

Figure 5-2



Do you still need to fill some holes in your fall schedule? Check out UEX's course lists! #UT18 #UT19 #ut20 #ut21 #hookem #longhorns <https://extension.utexas.edu/courses>



University Extension (UEX) - The University of Texas at Austin

Learn More

College & University

Like Comment Share

Figure 5-3

Figures 5-1, 5-2, and 5-3 from UT Austin's University Extension Program all focus on helping students "stay on track to graduate in four years". This idea is seen in each of these ads. Another key theme represented is "filling the gaps in your schedule". Figures 5-2 and 5-3 specifically address this issue. Figure 5-2 even highlights some selected courses in the carousel portion of the ad. As summarized by the phrase on Figure 5-1, these ads are all geared towards students who want to finish their degree in four years because "Time is money". University Extension is positioning themselves as the program that can help students most efficiently arrange their schedule so the dream of finishing in a timely manner can become a reality.

 **University Extension (UEX) – The University of Texas at Austin** ...  
March 22 · 🌐

Need a space to work on your UT Extension Online Courses? Check out Austin's top 13 spots for studying!



**The 13 Best Places with a Study Area in Austin**  
We did the research so that you don't have to.  
FOURSQUARE.COM

**Figure 5-4**

Similar to **Figures 4-1, 4-2, and 4-3** from UF Flexible Learning, this ad shares a relevant tip for both current and prospective students. The ad is lacking a call to action, but it still is indirectly promoting the University Extension Program. However, this ad is only speaking to a very limited audience – students who live in Austin, Texas. Knowing “The 13 Best Places with a Study Area in Austin” wouldn’t be very helpful to a student living in California who was using the University Extension Program to take some courses. The conclusion is that University Extension is targeting on-campus students from UT Austin.


**University Extension (UEX) – The University of Texas at Austin**  
 November 1 · 🌐

Are you ready to go from #Wantpreneur to #Entrepreneur? Great! We have a course for that.  
<https://extension.utexas.edu/business-foundations>



**University Extension (UEX) – The University of Texas at Austin**  
 College & University

Learn More

**Figure 5-5**


**University Extension (UEX) – The University of Texas at Austin**  
 September 4 · 🌐

Through University Extension, the McCombs Business Foundations Program (BFP) offers self-paced online versions of their essential business courses to anyone with an interest in earning credit from UT Austin. Register anytime! <https://extension.utexas.edu/business>



Foundations of Accounting



Foundations of Finance

Like Comment Share

**Figure 5-6**

**Figures 5-5 and 5-6** present course specific ads from the University Extension Program. The hashtags used in **Figure 5-5** are a unique way of connecting with the prospective audience and capturing their attention. **Figure 5-6** presents several courses all within the business discipline. This is an extremely helpful ad for a student who was specifically interested in brushing up on their business skills.

## Louisiana State University – Online Distance Learning



Figure 6-1



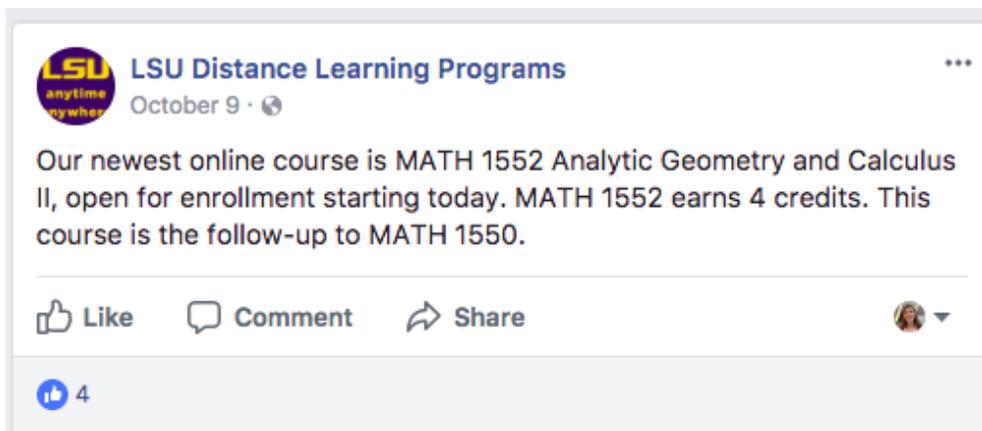
Figure 6-2

**Figures 6-1** and **6-2** present interesting facts about LSU’s Online Distance Learning program that could be informative to potential students. For example, **Figure 6-1** notifies the audience that the Online Distance Learning program is not just for in-state students. In fact, the program is designed for and utilized by many out-of-state students. This information can make prospective students feel more comfortable with their decision to take courses from LSU even though they are out of state.

**Figure 6-2** praises the course development staff for the newly released courses, but also indirectly promotes the Online Distance Learning program. Prospective students who see this ad will more than likely be impressed and want to check out what the program has to offer.



**Figure 6-3**



**Figure 6-4**

**Figures 6-3** and **6-4** present the course specific ads delivered by LSU's Online Distance Learning program. Out of all the course specific ads, these are probably the least eye-catching. Since the visual appearance of the ads isn't the best, they will probably be less effective than the course specific ads presented by other universities. However, the text of the ad gets the point across and highlights the fact that the courses offered by LSU are "general education" classes that are "open enrollment".

## University of Wisconsin – Independent Learning



**University of Wisconsin-Independent Learning** September 18, 2016 · 🌐

Wish you could take that tough course at a less stressful pace? Then the University of Wisconsin Independent Learning is just for you. Choose from nearly 100 courses!

**UW Independent Learning Course Catalog | UW Independent Learning**

University of Wisconsin Independent Learning has nearly 100 courses to choose from. Browse our course catalog!

IL.WISCONSIN.EDU

👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share

**Figure 7-1**



**University of Wisconsin-Independent Learning** February 20, 2013 · 🌐

How's your semester going? Remember if you need to add a class, UW Independent Learning has more than 100 courses available. And you can start any time. <http://bit.ly/qXwh9x>

**UW Independent Learning Course Catalog**

Welcome to the Independent Learning course catalog. We currently offer more than 125 courses for university undergraduate credit. Courses range...

IL.WISCONSIN.EDU

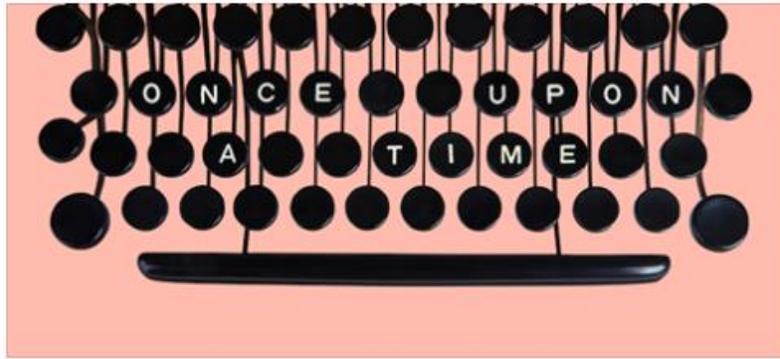
👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share

**Figure 7-2**

**Figures 7-1 and 7-2** represent the program specific ads offered by UW Independent Learning. Both ads indicate that Independent Learning offers around 100 courses. **Figure 7-1** includes language such as “tough courses” and “less stressful”. The combination of those two phrases would be attractive to students who were facing difficult courses and wanted to take the class in a setting that was less nerve-racking and more tense-free. **Figure 7-2** reminds prospective students that they can start their courses at any time, a common theme across all Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs. The use of the ellipses in **Figure 7-2** after the words “Courses range” cause readers to be intrigued enough to click on the ad and see the list of course offerings.

Channel your inner writer. Take the online course Creative Writing: The Short Story.

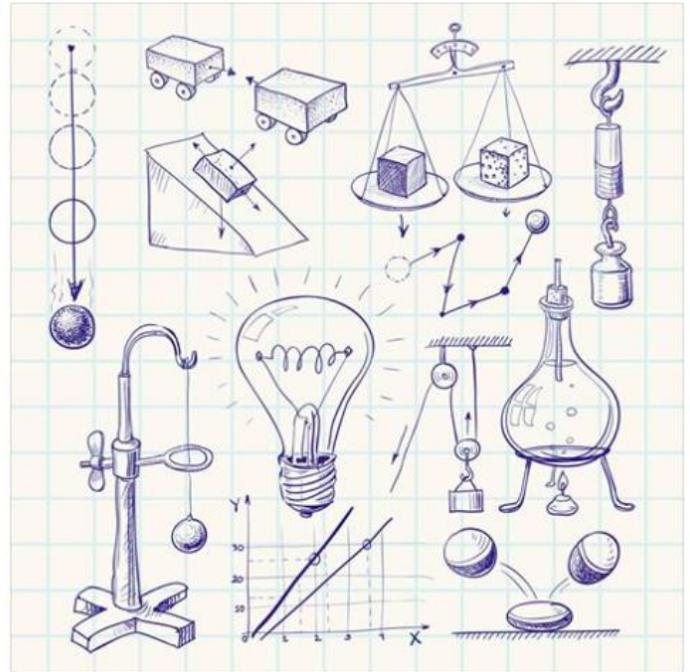
Click here to see details: <http://ow.ly/L2FjQ>



Like Comment Share

Figure 7-3

Take a physics class at a less stressful pace. Try General Physics I online through Independent Learning: <http://ow.ly/KynlC>



Like Comment Share

Figure 7-4

Want to learn how to order food in French? Start with a 101 course\*: <http://ow.ly/KvDnw>

\*If you're a full-time student at any UW institution (other than UW-Stout), you may be eligible for enrollment in an IL course without paying additional tuition!



Like Comment Share

Figure 7-5

These inviting course-specific ads present just a few of the many courses offered by UW's Independent Learning program. Not only does Independent Learning promote purely academic classes such as in **Figure 7-4**, but they also present ads for fun, elective-style courses such as in **Figures 7-3** and **7-5**. This collection of ads reaches a vast audience and can suit many specific needs. The ads also portray important information about the Independent Learning program. For example, in **Figure 7-5**, tuition options are presented for full time UW students. In **Figure 7-4**, the idea that these courses are presented at a "less stressful pace" is reiterated.

There are several similarities and differences between the various Facebook advertisements delivered by the individual universities. Each school demonstrated their program's uniqueness, but all of them presented the central message of Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs: The ability to take required college classes online, anytime, from any location. The magic of Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs comes when the advantages of the program are tied to the availability of the courses. All the universities portrayed this message through their advertisements. In addition, all the universities used similar advertising formats including course specific and program specific ads. However, there were distinct differences in the advertisements that made each university stand apart from the others. University of Florida honed in on the fact that Flexible Learning offered Gen-Ed courses that could help students advance to their major as efficiently as possible. University of Texas at Austin stressed the idea that "Time is Money" and that University Extension could assist students in finishing their degree in four years. Louisiana State University emphasized that Online Distance Learning Courses are encouraged to be taken from any location, even out-of-state. Finally, University of Wisconsin showed that Independent Learning courses could range from topics such as Physics to French and everything in between, all of which are presented at a less stressful pace. The differences that are seen across the individual messaging styles point to the exclusive strengths of each program.

I did observe that some key discriminators are missing from these ads. First, a major component of Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs is the final transcript combined with the acceptability and transfer of the credits back to the student's home university. However, none of the ads mentioned something such as "Our credits are accepted and easily transfer to X number of universities, click here to see a complete list". Another missing component was the price of the courses. None of the universities seemed to want to mention the cost savings that students can experience by taking Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs. Maybe the omission of cost from the ads is a strategic decision rather than an oversight because once cost is introduced price wars begin and all the universities would begin their race to the bottom.

## Marketing Theory and Academic Analysis

Advertising can take many different forms as seen through the university marketing figures. There are some key differences among the numerous advertising strategies as well as determinations made from marketing theories that can vary the effectiveness of the overall campaign.

To begin, there are major differences between informative, inspirational, and persuasive ads. All three are seen in the above examples. According to Wan's journal article on "The Effect of Firm Marketing Content", "informative social media marketing content is more effective in stimulating product sales than persuasive and promotional contents...specifically for sales of high involvement products". Higher education is definitely a high involvement purchase, defined by Zaichkowsky (qtd. in Wan) as a "product nature of high value or high risk". **Figures 2-5, 2-10, 2-12, 3-2, 4-5** are all great examples of informative advertising content. They provide opportunities for prospective students to learn more about the nature of the program, along with information about upcoming events, such as webinars in which students can gather even more knowledge about the programs. The succinct language used in **Figure 3-2** quickly translates the important points about the program to the audience: "Affordable and Convenient, UEX Courses are open for registration. Fill the gaps in your schedule and stay on track to graduate in four years". These examples fulfill the qualifications of informative ads. The content of all the ads "refers to factual data on the nature and functions of products or services that could reduce uncertainty" (Abernethy & Franke qtd. in Fei Wan). The fact that informative ads are the most effective type of advertising for generating sales is valuable knowledge and should guide universities as they set up their advertising efforts. Not only are informative ads productive for increasing revenue but they are also, "the most common type of content that marketers employ on social media platforms" (Fei Wan). This statement is verified by the fact that the majority of the example advertisements presented in this paper are informative in nature.

In addition to informative ads, there are also inspirational ads. As stated by Böttger in his journal article, "Customer Inspiration: Conceptualization, Scale Development, and Validation", "inspiration includes the transition from the state of 'being inspired by' an external factor, to a state of 'being inspired to 'actualize a new idea'". This is the goal of all advertisers within the higher education space. They want to take prospective students from a place of being inspired to a point of acting upon that inspiration. **Figures 1-12 and 2-7** both demonstrate inspirational ads. Both ads share a success story, either of one individual (in the case of **Figure 1-12**) or of a group of individuals (in the case of **Figure 2-7**). This success story is intended to induce the state of inspiration and then cause students to be motivated and take action, whether that means applying for the program, registering for new courses, etc. Through his research, Böttger found "evidence that customer inspiration correlates with attitudinal consequences such as loyalty and satisfaction". This is an important point for university program advertisers to digest. Not only is it important to create informative content in order to generate revenue, but also inspirational content that will increase brand loyalty and repeat purchases (advanced degree programs, more non-degree courses, etc.)

Persuasive advertising is the last form of marketing that is visualized. Even though "persuasive content and promotional content are more sales effective for low-involvement products" (Fei

Wan), that doesn't mean that higher education institutions shouldn't use persuasive advertising methods. As stated by Armstrong, Berger & Milkman, and Nan & Faber (qtd. in Fei Wan):

“Persuasive content is a concept that assumes consumers already have an understanding of the nature and functions of product but need to be convinced for the benefits of the product that distinguish it from alternatives in the market”.

Combining persuasive ads with informative and inspirational ads could be an impactful strategy. The informative ads make prospective students aware of the program and generate potential sales. The inspirational ads induce brand loyalty and then the persuasive ads reinforce the messages provided by previous advertising and entice audience members by sharing benefits of the program, not features. **Figure 5-5** is an example of a persuasive advertisement. In this ad, the university shares a quick message: “Go from #Wantrapreneur to #Entrepreneur”. This message highlights that the university offers unique courses that are distinguishable from other Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs. However, this ad wouldn't be effective without the supporting informative ads that were previously discussed.

Another theory that is important to highlight is the concept of branding and imagery. Brand images can be distinctly seen in **Figures 1-7 through 1-10**. Each of these ads purely focuses on a mascot to convey a message to the audience. “Brand mascots are animals or objects that are altered in some way to resemble the human form” according to Cayla, Connell, Aguirre-Rodriguez, Khogeer and Aggarwal & McGill (qtd. in Bennet). Not only do these mascots instantly identify the university that is providing the ad, but they also begin to build rapport with students. Bas, firinci & Cilingir and Chandler & Schwarz (qtd. in Bennet) claim that “consumers often form emotionally rich interpersonal relationships with anthropomorphic mascots that influence brand relationships, choice, and loyalty”. Similar to the inspirational ads, the use of brand mascots increases loyalty and could be a good addition to a university's online marketing campaigns.

Imagery, like advertising in general, can take several forms. Imagery can be “comprised of either groups or individuals and then evaluated as to whether they were meant to promote affiliation (i.e., people like you), aspiration (i.e., success), or instruction (i.e., classroom settings, professors, or administrators)” (Adams). All of these forms of imagery are shown throughout the various ad examples. There are images of students, staff members, and inspirational statements. According to Böttger, “Imagery processing may foster inspiration, thus encouraging firms to use engaging imagery”. Therefore, including a valuable image can be extremely crucial to an advertising strategy. As the adage states, “a picture is worth a thousand words”. As concluded by Bas, firinci & Cilingir and Chandler & Schwarz (qtd. in Bennet) in their research on brand mascots, people “enter into casual conversations with a cuddly toy mascot more easily than with a faceless service”. The same principle can be applied to any general image provided in marketing material. The audience's attention is much more likely to be grabbed when an image is attached.

Imagery also relates to viral content. Of course, every marketer's dream is that their online advertisement will go viral and be seen by many in a positive light. As evidenced in Böttger's research, “online content that evoked high-arousal emotions was more viral, regardless of

whether those emotions were of a positive (i.e., awe) or negative (i.e., anger or anxiety) nature”. Imagery and brand mascots can be used to produce positive, high-arousal emotions of awe and inspiration.

Finally, the concept of market segmentation can affect advertising strategies. Market segmentation is defined as “the way a company decides to group customers based on important differences in their needs, in order to gain a competitive advantage” (Hill). Different program types have individualized business models that advertisers need to adhere to in order to be successful. For example, the prospective student for a Traditional On-Campus program may be in a different demographic with unique needs compared to the perspective student for a Non-Degree Single Course Online College Program. The strategy that the institution decides to employ via its advertising must be tailored to these distinctive situations. Rovai and Downey (qtd. in McMurty) “explain three marketing strategies related to online learning: (1) cost leadership strategies focused on out-pricing the competition; (2) differentiation strategies focused on the uniqueness of the program; and (3) focus strategies that meet the needs of a particular type of student”. University programs will have to choose the marketing strategy that is best for them. For example, **Figure 2-9** is a great example of an advertisement that follows a market segmentation approach, specially a focus strategy. The ad is targeted towards adults who may have fears about returning to their college education. Rovai and Downey (qtd. in McMurty) also identify different online education audiences including: “corporate learners, professional enhancement learners, degree-completion adult learners, college experience learners (the traditional student), precollege (K-12) learners, remediation and test preparation learners, and recreational learners”. Again, each of these groups has unique needs and there are various strategies that the university can undertake to meet those needs. It is the job of the program’s marketing team to identify their audience, recognize the audiences’ needs, and implement an advertising campaign that speaks to those needs.

Based on these marketing notions, it can be suggested that universities marketing any program type, whether it be Traditional On-Campus, Online, or Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs, should have a mix of advertisements including informative, inspirational, and persuasive in their marketing campaigns. In addition, the inclusion of brand mascots and imagery can be effective in attracting the attention of prospective students. Lastly, a market segmentation strategy should be followed in order to most effectively promote the program to the right audience.

## A Discussion of Brand Reputation

As noted earlier, UCLA's The American Freshman Report suggests "that the primary university selection criteria is 'academic reputation' which is closely followed by the belief 'this college's graduates get good jobs'" (Eagan). Interestingly, none of the example advertisements for Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs have messaging that relates to university reputation or ranking. The noteworthy omission of this detail within the programs' advertisements is worth analyzing further.

The four universities studied: University of Florida, University of Texas at Austin, Louisiana State University, and University of Wisconsin should not be ashamed in proclaiming their school rankings within their advertisements. University of Florida is ranked in the Top 10 Public Schools (#9). University of Wisconsin and University of Texas at Austin are in the Top 20 (#12 and #18, respectively). Louisiana State University also ranks high on the Top Public Schools, rating #63 (U.S. News College). It's odd to see that the marketing for the Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs offered by these institutions doesn't boast about the high accolades the universities have earned. This is an especially crucial factor to note after taking in the facts found in The American Freshmen Report and from the academic research discussed above, such as the importance of informative advertising for generating sales.

The universities obviously aren't afraid to talk about rankings within their advertisements for other programs. For example, **Figures 1-1, 1-2, and 1-3** (advertisements for Traditional On-Campus programs) primarily focus on these rankings. In addition, **Figure 2-1** showcases an advertisement for an online program that solely relies upon the ranking of the program to sell prospective students on the university's offering. However, none of these types of ads are seen once in the section for example advertisements of Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs.

I believe this presents a great opportunity for the marketing of Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs. The reputation of the university needs to be leveraged, especially when the university is highly regarded such as the universities being studied in this paper. The power of branding, as discussed earlier, is enormous and marketers for these programs need to take advantage of that power. When rankings are discussed in the advertisement, the marketer can intertwine the benefits of informative advertising with the prestige of reputation. This mixture also offers a persuasive spin to the advertisement. Not only are prospective students informed about the university's incredible reputation, but they are also persuaded to study at such an honorable university. This type of advertisement gives prospective students a feature and a benefit wrapped into one causing countless emotions to be triggered when the audience sees the ad.

Based on the above observations, I believe it would be wise for the marketing departments of Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs to branch into the style of messaging that promotes the rankings of the university in which the program is being offered at. This prestigious message can be woven into the framework of an informative, inspirational, or persuasive advertisement. Below are some proto-types of what these types of advertisements could look like:

**Figure 8-1: Informative**

**University of Florida Flexible Learning** Sponsored ·

Did you know that UF Flexible Learning is a program offered by a Top 10 Public University?

Learn from one of the best without being admitted!  
Start earning Gen-Ed credits today.

**Flexible Learning | University of Florida**  
Online courses open to anyone. Earn transferable college credit online, anytime.

FLEXIBLE.DCE.UFL.EDU [Learn More](#)

Like Comment Share

**Figure 8-2: Persuasive**

**University of Florida Flexible Learning** Sponsored ·

Don't take your missing degree requirements from just ~any~ university. Earn credits from a Top 10 Public University! Earn a UF transcript and apply credits to your home college!

Learn more:

**Flexible Learning | University of Florida**  
Online courses open to anyone. Earn transferable college credit online, anytime.

FLEXIBLE.DCE.UFL.EDU [Learn More](#)

Like Comment Share

**Figure 8-3: Inspirational**

**University of Florida Flexible Learning** Sponsored ·

Thinking about graduating earlier? Start earning credits from a Top 10 Public University today and transfer them back to your school!

**Flexible Learning | University of Florida**  
Online courses open to anyone. Earn transferable college credit online, anytime.

FLEXIBLE.DCE.UFL.EDU [Learn More](#)

Like Comment Share

## Experiment One

To test the validity of including brand reputation in the messaging of advertisements for Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs, two experiments with various ads were run on Facebook via UF Flexible Learning.

The first experiment tested the ads portrayed in **Figures 8-1, 8-2, and 8-3**. The ads were run from March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018 – March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018 and they were targeted towards college-aged students across the country. The result that the ads were optimized for were link clicks.

**Table 1**

Ad Name	Reach	Impressions	Link Clicks	Cost per Click	Click Through Rate	Landing Page Views	Page Engagement	Post Engagement
<b>Informative</b> (Figure 8-1)	4406	4800	29	\$2.30	.9	18	34	34
<b>Persuasive</b> (Figure 8-2)	4226	4947	18	\$3.69	.75	6	30	29
<b>Inspirational</b> (Figure 8-3)	4558	5559	8	\$8.27	.45	3	21	20

Reach is the “number of people who saw the ad at least once” (Facebook Ads Manager). The reach for all three ads were very comparable, all within the low-mid 4000s range. The inspirational ad had the most impressions, which is defined as “the number of times the ad was on screen” (Facebook Ads Manager). However, the informative ad still got the most link clicks. The cost per click for the informative ad was the overall winner. The inspirational ad had an alarmingly high cost per click. This is most likely due to the low number of link clicks that this ad received. The informative and persuasive ads had impressive click through rates as “the average for ads from the education industry on Facebook is .73” (Irvine). Click through rate measures the ratio of total clicks to impressions. Therefore, the higher the click through rate, the better. The informative ad was the clear winner in landing page views. This is the “number of times a person clicked on an ad link and successfully loaded the destination webpage”. This is a very important metric as getting potential students to the landing page is one of the optimal goals of an advertising campaign for these program types. Page engagement measures “the total number of actions that people took on your Facebook page” (Facebook Ads Manager). Again, the informative ad is leading in this metric as well as in the post engagement metric. Similar to page engagement, post engagement tallies “the total number of actions that people take involving your ads” (Facebook Ads Manager).

The winning ad, as determined by Facebook, for this experiment was the informative ad. This ad had the lowest cost per click, highest click through rate, largest number of link clicks and landing

page views, as well as the highest engagement levels compared to the other two ads. Interestingly, this is the only ad that contains a brand reputation statement in both the commentary and imagery of the ad. Perhaps this reinforcement of UF's Top 10 ranking is beneficial in getting the overarching message across to audience members.

## Experiment Two

In order to test the theory of brand reputation further, another ad set was designed and tested on Facebook.

Figure 9-1: Informative

 **University of Florida Flexible Learning**  
Sponsored ·  Like Page

Start earning Gen-Ed credits today with UF Flexible Learning. Learn from a Top 10 Public University and take your classes online, anytime – no admissions necessary.



**TOP 10**  
BEST PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

**BEST COLLEGES**  
USNews  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES PUBLIC 2018

**Flexible Learning | University of Florida**  
Online courses open to anyone. Earn transferable college credit online, anytime.

FLEXIBLE.DCE.UFL.EDU [Learn More](#)

1 Like

 Like  Comment  Share

Figure 9-2: Persuasive

 **University of Florida Flexible Learning**  
Sponsored ·  Like Page

Earn college credit online, on your own time. You can start a course TODAY and transfer the credits back to your university.



**YOUR SCHEDULE, ANYTIME**

**UF** Flexible Learning  
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

**Flexible Learning | University of Florida**  
Online courses open to anyone. Earn transferable college credit online, anytime.

FLEXIBLE.DCE.UFL.EDU [Learn More](#)

1 Like

 Like  Comment  Share

Figure 9-3: Inspirational

 **University of Florida Flexible Learning**  
Sponsored ·  Like Page

Thinking about graduating earlier? Get ahead on your Gen-Ed credits with UF Flexible Learning. Take classes online, anytime, and transfer the credits back to your university.



**FIND SUCCESS ONLINE**

**UF** Flexible Learning  
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

**Flexible Learning | University of Florida**  
Online courses open to anyone. Earn transferable college credit online, anytime.

FLEXIBLE.DCE.UFL.EDU [Learn More](#)

 Like  Comment  Share

The imagery for all three new ads was kept exactly the same. However, the text commentary for the ads was changed compared to the first set. For the new informative ad, **Figure 9-1**, the wording was kept very similar, still honing in on the idea that UF is a Top 10 Public University. The new persuasive ad, **Figure 9-2**, eliminates the line “Don’t take your missing degree requirements from just *any* university” from the ad text. From the first experiment, it was discovered that this phrasing had a negative connotation that was inhibiting the ad’s success. Finally, the new inspirational ad, **Figure 9-3**, also eliminates the “Top 10 Public University” wording from the ad text. In addition, the phrase “Gen-Ed credits” is added to the new inspirational ad. As a result, the only new ad that touches upon brand reputation is the informative ad, **Figure 9-1**, which happened to be the most successful ad from the first experiment. Because the experiment was designed accordingly, the results were able to expand upon whether heavily relying upon brand reputation in the advertisements is a successful strategy.

These ads were run from March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018 – April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018 and they were targeted towards college-aged students across the country. Identical to the first experiment, the result that the ads were optimized for were link clicks.

**Table 2**

Ad Name	Reach	Impressions	Link Clicks	Cost per Click	Click Through Rate	Landing Page Views	Page Engagement	Post Engagement
<b>Informative</b> (Figure 9-1)	5152	7982	31	\$2.11	.69	9	32	32
<b>Persuasive</b> (Figure 9-2)	5906	8906	41	\$1.63	.8	8	43	42
<b>Inspirational</b> (Figure 9-3)	4420	5505	42	\$1.59	.99	11	46	44

On average, the results from Experiment Two are much better than Experiment One. Reach, impressions, link clicks, click through rate, landing page views, page engagement, and post engagement for this ad set were all higher on average than the results from the first ad set run in Experiment One. In addition, the average cost per click for the ads in Experiment Two are much lower. It can therefore be concluded that the messaging used in the ads from this ad set were more effective than the ads from Experiment One. The inspirational ad, **Figure 9-3**, was the overall winner determined by Facebook for this ad set. The conclusion that can be made is that including brand reputation in the advertisement imagery and text might not be as effective as hypothesized. The inspirational ad from Experiment Two, which included no reference to UF’s academic rankings, beat the informative ad from Experiment Two, which was the winning ad out of all the “brand reputation ads” tested in Experiment One. Below is the comparison of the two winning ads. The informative ad, **Figure 8-1** from experiment one, and the inspirational ad, **Figure 9-3**, from Experiment Two.

**Table 3**

<b>Ad Name</b>	<b>Reach</b>	<b>Impressions</b>	<b>Link Clicks</b>	<b>Cost per Click</b>	<b>Click Through Rate</b>	<b>Landing Page Views</b>	<b>Page Engagement</b>	<b>Post Engagement</b>
<b>Informative</b> (Figure 8-1)	4406	4800	29	\$2.30	.9	18	34	34
<b>Inspirational</b> (Figure 9-3)	4420	5505	42	\$1.59	.99	11	46	44

The two winning ads had very similar reaches, however the inspirational ad won in regards to impressions. The link clicks for the inspirational ad were much higher than the informative ad. As a result, the cost per click for the inspirational ad was significantly lower. Both click through rates were above average. The page and post engagements for the inspirational ad were higher alluding to the fact that the inspirational ad captivated the audience more successfully.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that **Figure 9-3**, the second inspirational ad was the overarching winner from the two experiments. If an advertiser of Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs wants to include brand reputation in their advertisements, the framework of **Figure 8-1** seems to be the best. However, as seen based on the overall results of the experiments, including this much information about brand reputation may not be the best strategy for the university. The addition of brand reputation might be more beneficial for other program types, such as Traditional On-Campus. Accordingly, references to brand reputation may be more beneficial for high involvement educational services, such as Traditional On-Campus or Online programs and not as effective for “lower involvement” educational services, such as the Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs. This idea can lay the groundwork for another experiment. Providers of Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs therefore should focus their advertising efforts on inspirational advertisements that encourage students to “actualize upon new ideas” (Böttger). In addition, it seems that providing imagery referring to graduation and the theme of success is the most captivating selling point for prospective students of Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs.

## Experiment Analysis

The experiments clearly unfolded that the inspirational advertisement, **Figure 9-3**, was the overall winner and should be the framework utilized by advertisers of Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs. There are many theoretical reasons for why the inspirational ad should be the winner, proving the results of the experiment to be valid and coherent with these expectations.

First of all, the overarching reason that students use Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs needs to be considered before creating an effective advertisement. These programs are mainly utilized by students to help them reach their academic goal of graduation. Students use the program to get credits to move ahead or catch up on their studies so that they can graduate on time or possibly even early. Some of the ads previously showcased from UF Flexible Learning and other Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs illustrate this idea. For example, **Figures 3-2** and **4-5** use language such as “stay on track to graduate” and “getting credits efficiently” to hit upon the main reason why students are using the service. The inspirational ad was the only ad in the experiments that clearly focused on the idea of graduation and UF Flexible Learning being a program to help students make that dream a reality. The inspirational ad hit upon the true reason for being a college student (graduating with a meaningful degree), while the informational and persuasive ads focused merely on features of the program (such as being offered by a Top 10 Public University and providing the flexibility to take the courses online, anytime), but not the real, ultimate benefit of the program.

Students have a sense of pride in their home university. Experiment Two had better results than Experiment One because of the recognition of this idea and how it relates to the marketing of Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs. All of the ads in Experiment One focused on brand reputation more than any other feature of the program. When the messaging was altered in Experiment Two, the results were much better. This is because the fact that UF is a Top 10 Public University isn't a main decision factor for prospective Non-Degree Single Course Online College Program students. This is a foundational marketing concept. It is important to recognize why the prospective customer wants to buy into a service. The fact that UF is a Top 10 Public University is a good point, but it is not the right feature for the marketing of this program to focus on. The ads for Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs aren't meant to persuade students to switch schools, but to help them reach their goal of graduation through the transfer of credits back to their home university.

Based on previously discussed marketing theory, inspirational ads cause the “transition from the state of ‘being inspired by’ an external factor, to a state of ‘being inspired to ‘actualize a new idea’” (Böttger). Whereas informative and persuasive ads simply “refer to factual data on the nature and functions of products or services that could reduce uncertainty” (Abernethy & Franke qtd. in Fei Wan). Accordingly, inspirational ads are destined to be the overall winner in terms of getting audience members to take a certain action because this is what inspiration is inherently designed to do. The inspirational ad had the best “call to action”. The point of inspirational ads is to inspire audience members as they see the ad and make them want to do something about their newfound inspiration right there and then. In contrast, informative ads have more of a building block effect. More than likely, when the audience sees an informative ad, they are connecting

more through the head than the heart, making their decision to act less rapid. This could be the underlying reason for the higher link clicks for the inspirational ad, and its ultimate marketing success. Inspirational ads capture attention and provoke action all at once.

The language used in the inspirational ad from Experiment Two covers all the important aspects of the program, creating another reason for why this ad was the overall winner. For instance, the inspirational ad: mentions graduation, guarantees that classes can be taken “online, anytime”, alludes to the idea of “getting ahead”, and reinforces the fact that credits can be transferred to the home university. The informative ad only references brand reputation (which again, may not be as effective as it seems because of the nature of and reasons for using the program) and the fact that classes can be taken “online, anytime”. Finally, the persuasive ad only discusses the fact that class can be taken “online, anytime” and that credits can be transferred. Breaking down the messaging in each ad evidently distinguishes the inspirational ad above the others. This ad touches upon four features of the program while the informative and persuasive ads only touch upon two. Because of the broader messaging, the inspirational ad most likely reached a larger array of prospective students that had various “trigger points” causing them to take action.

As Böttger notes, “imagery processing may foster inspiration”, so it is not only important that marketers choose the correct wording, but also the most effective imagery. The branding and imagery found in the inspirational ad is another reason why this ad was the most successful. As discussed earlier in the paper, imagery can have several different forms. According to Adams, the three “imagery categories are affiliation, aspiration, and instruction”. The imagery in the inspirational ad is definitely in the aspirational category of imagery. Out of all the ads, the imagery in the inspirational ad is the most meaningful because it succinctly represents an idea (graduation) that relates to and touches prospective students. The other two ads don’t have imagery that directly falls into one of these categories, resulting in their lackluster performance compared to the inspirational ad.

It’s astounding to notice the significant performance improvement that the inspirational ad underwent between Experiment One and Experiment Two. The major component that was changed between the two versions of the ad was the messaging. The new inspirational ad eliminated the “Top 10” remarks and replaced them with more informative comments, such as the fact that UF Flexible Learning offers students the opportunity to take “Gen-Ed Credits...online, anytime”. Therefore, I believe the new inspirational ad improved so dramatically because it truly is an all-encompassing ad. It not only provides inspiration, but all pieces of information, combining the benefits of inspirational and informative advertising all into this one advertisement. In addition, the imagery of the inspirational ad better relates to the messaging in the new inspirational ad, compared to the first inspirational ad. Ultimately, this new messaging did an utterly effective job in communicating the value of UF Flexible Learning, while inspiring students with the imagery of graduation, resulting in the outstanding performance metrics compared to its results in Experiment One.

In summary, the inspirational ad was the most effective form of advertising for Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs because of its ability to most accurately identify and respond to the students’ purpose of using the program, its fundamental nature (compared to informative and persuasive ads), and its on point messaging and imagery.

## Conclusion

Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs are becoming increasingly popular in the higher education industry. They allow students from various backgrounds and stages of life to continue their education for a variety of purposes. As more universities such as University of Florida, University of Texas at Austin, Louisiana State University, and University of Wisconsin begin to add Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs to their offerings, the need for effective advertising will become increasingly significant.

The first major takeaway from this research is that Traditional On-Campus, Online, and Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs have various methods for advertising. Each program type requires certain messaging and imagery in order to engage and influence the audience members. In addition, it is important for advertisers to review the theories of informative, persuasive, and inspirational advertising. These three ad types all have their pros and cons so it is important that the university understands what ad type would be most beneficial for the program they are advertising. Likewise, market segmentation also needs to be studied by university advertisers, especially for Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs. These programs meet the needs of a wide array of students, so it is crucial that advertisers select their segment wisely and target their ads towards this audience group. In regards, to Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs, the most beneficial advertising method seems to be the inspirational strategy. Alluding to themes such as success and graduation gets the attention of prospective students for this program and influences them to take the next step in learning more about the offering.

There is much room for further study regarding the effective advertising strategies of Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs. Future research questions could include the study of what online platforms are most beneficial (Facebook vs. Instagram vs. Twitter vs. LinkedIn, etc.). In addition, analyzing what demographic best responds to these advertisements could be interesting and beneficial for future ad campaigns. Similarly, a research question studying whether prospective students respond better to advertisements about the general program or specific courses could provide valuable information. Experimentation with other ad types, such as carousel and video ads could also be explored.

In conclusion by utilizing and expanding upon the research conducted in this paper, advertisers for Non-Degree Single Course Online College Programs can build program awareness by creating effective ads that will be appealing and influential for prospective students.

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