

UAM IDI Findings

Strengths

When imagining describing UAM to someone who has never heard of UAM, influencers almost exclusively describe UAM as small and having a personal touch with its students. Overall, influencers are not able to go much deeper than these surface-level descriptors. However, certain academic programs are mentioned as particularly strong as well (see Academics).

Weaknesses

Facilities are far and away the top mention for weaknesses of UAM. Influencers realize change in infrastructure is a long-term project, but they think that it can be a prohibitive aspect for prospective students. Additionally, the tension between the ideas of open admissions and providing opportunities for all students is evident; influencers have mixed feelings on whether open admissions is a strength or weakness for UAM. UAM's recruitment activities/materials are also frequently cited as a weakness — limited to no recruitment materials, limited to no school visits, not knowing who the admissions' representative is in their area, etc. Finally, a smaller number of influencers are not sure how strong advising is at UAM.

Academics

Forestry, nursing, and education are most frequently mentioned as strong academic programs at UAM. For forestry, influencers note the uniqueness of the program as the only program of its kind in Arkansas. For nursing, strong outcomes — placement and passage rates — are a common response as to why nursing is particularly strong at UAM. Lastly, the output of teachers/educators in the area is a key point for why the education program is strong at UAM.

“Right Fit” Students

When describing students who are the “right fit” for UAM, influencers frequently and proudly point to students who are driven and hard-workers. One influencer describes these students as, “students who want a start.” Another influencer remarks that students who are the “right fit” for UAM want to, “better their lives. Most [students] come from middle income families and were not born with a silver spoon in their mouths. UAM students work hard to better themselves.” The idea of students who want to better their lives is apparent in many answers.

Other common answers among influencers are students who are small town, local types of people. It is assumed these types of students are okay with the fact that there “isn't much to do” at UAM; rural and “good ole country folk” fit in well at UAM. Also, influencers feel that “right fit” students have a wide variety of academic abilities. They recognize that where this presents a challenge is in relation to the preparedness of incomings students to UAM. In their opinion, some students are able to rise to the occasion, and some are not. Finally, a smaller number of influencers mention that students who are searching for leadership opportunities can be the “right fit” and do well at UAM. These influencers say that UAM's small size allows students with leadership skills (or students who want to gain leadership skills) the ability to flourish in the various opportunities.

Overall, influencers feel these are the types of students that UAM should attract (or continue to attract).

Influencers were asked what UAM should change in order to attract and retain more of these types of students. Most say that UAM needs better recruitment activities/materials. In addition to needing better school visits, events, recruitment materials, etc., the broader sentiment is that UAM simply needs more of these. The idea of more visibility for admissions is echoed for general University marketing as well. There is an overwhelming call for UAM to market more. The one other suggestion influencers give to UAM is that the University should provide more extracurricular educational and student life

opportunities to keep students on campus more.

Recommending UAM to Students

Influencers clearly communicate that they need more information, talking points, and recruitment materials in order to recommend UAM to students. In fact, influencers say that with these three things — more information about UAM, UAM talking points, and UAM recruitment materials — they would be more likely to recommend UAM to prospective students.

Completing a Degree at UAM

The overwhelming consensus among influencers is that UAM does prepare students to succeed. Nearly every influencer agrees with this point.

When asked whether or not a UAM degree is respected, nearly every influencer agrees that a UAM degree is respected. However, a number of influencers feel like the further one goes away from Southeast Arkansas, a UAM degree is less understood — a UAM awareness issue as opposed to lack of respect for the degree. An influencer who was not as familiar with UAM before becoming connected with the University notes, “At first I was concerned. I wondered if I should send my children to UAM because it may not be that well respected. But now I feel that UAM is a good school, offering a good education.”

Opinion of UAM

The number of influencers who say that their opinion of UAM has gotten better or not changed over the past few years significantly outnumbers those who say their opinion has gotten worse. Reasons for why their opinion has gotten better include new leadership, stronger programs, UAM’s regional impact, and a better understanding of the University after getting closer to UAM. Reasons why opinion has gotten worse center around changes in leadership and faculty.

UAM & Monticello/Southeast Arkansas

Influencers believe that the relationship between UAM and Monticello and the greater Southeast Arkansas region is critical. UAM is seen as the economic and intellectual driver in the region. Influencers note that as the only university in a nearly 60-mile radius, UAM is the only opportunity for higher education for a large number of students in Southeast Arkansas who are not able to take advantage of higher education outside of the region. Additionally, influencers affectionately describe the importance of UAM being one of the largest employers and its graduates serving in important roles (hospitals, banks, schools, etc.) in the region. Even though these overarching benefits of UAM in the region are felt and appreciated, there is a sentiment among some influencers that UAM could do more to partner with Monticello on a more tactical level.

Student Success Center

The top-of-mind — and essentially the only — aspect influencers knew about the upcoming Student Success Center was the Chick-fil-A. However, giving a more apt description of the types of services the Student Success Center will provide, influencers are overjoyed to hear that something like this is being created at UAM for students; they think it is a great idea. Nearly every influencer believes that the Student Success Center will bring together many of the functions that students need to succeed — addressing some of the concerns about UAM’s low retention rate. Influencers feel like the purpose of the Student Success Center could have been communicated more effectively.

Messaging Statements

Influencers were read the overarching aspects of the five messaging statements tested in the quantitative research: “Drive,” “Open Opportunity,” “People,” “Resources,” and “The Next Step.” The message that most resonates with influencers is “People.” To explain why that statement resonates most, one influencer says, “The commitment to people at UAM is key to the lives of students. UAM actually cares about you — the person. Folks at UAM are part of the team.” The next most salient message to influencers is “Open Opportunity.” Pointing to the word empowerment in the messaging statement, one influencer notes, “Empowerment is a strong word. Without empowerment, you have nothing.” Finally, the message statement that is third-most chosen is “Drive.” Even though “Drive” is not the most chosen message, it prompts some of the most emotionally driven stories about influencers interactions with UAM. One influencer, who is also an alum states, “I wouldn’t

have gone to college if it weren't for UAM. We all learned, engaged, and grew. The minute I was on campus, the light went on. UAM opened the doors for me.”