



Frank Phillips - Marketing Study Findings



In the last installment of the Messenger, I promised to share the findings of the Ian Symmonds and Associates marketing study for St. Mary's that began last winter and concluded this April. In addition to a detailed on-line survey of our current families, Ian conducted extensive personal interviews with St. Mary's students, parents, teachers, staff, and alumni. He also interviewed "opinion leaders" in the Rogue Valley who did not have any connection to St. Mary's School. Ian met several times with a twelve-person steering committee comprising administrators, board members, and parents. The committee discussed the results of Ian's research and its implications for marketing and strategic enrollment initiatives at St. Mary's School over the next five years. Like any study of this type, Ian's work told us much about our school that we somehow knew on an intuitive level, yet had not really articulated in a concise and meaningful way.

So, bearing in mind that these are general observations, in bulleted format, here are some salient findings from Ian's research:

Plusses:

- Our students are very comfortable with the faculty and with themselves. St. Mary's is an OK place to be oneself.
- Our students see the relevance in their studies, i.e., that their teachers go out of their way to make meaningful connections between their subjects and the real world.
- Positive interaction with parents who have, or have had, children enrolled at St. Mary's is the number one reason new families choose to come to the school, so please keep the good word-of-mouth going! Thank you to all of our present and past parents for keeping your school flourishing via your excellent interpersonal skills. The number two reason for an enrollment decision was a prospective family's positive interaction with a teacher or staff member, so kudos to our teachers and staff as well.
- St. Mary's takes full advantage of its independent school status to offer an innovative curriculum, employ innovative teachers, and use its resources efficiently for the benefit of its students. In other words, our funds are expended first and foremost on behalf of the students, not to satisfy various bureaucracies.
- St. Mary's is a safe and civil place to be an intellectual and to engage in free thought. The

school is ruled neither by the forces of political correctness nor by pressure to join the "right" clubs and cliques, but by an appreciation for the minds of individuals.

- It is a clear part of the school culture that students and teachers respect each others' ideas and beliefs, that St. Mary's is a safe haven of civility and tolerance, and that the campus is not politicized and strident.
- St. Mary's spirit of community service is real. A commitment to social justice and lending a helping hand is a sincere part of the school's culture.
- The school does a nice job embracing its 140 year-old Catholic mission. St. Mary's thrives on the 2,000 year heritage of intellectual, educational, and charitable achievements of the Catholic Church. St. Mary's displays these solid Catholic values in a region that is demographically not largely Catholic. The emphasis is on living out those values. This has been a vital aspect of the school since the Sisters of the Holy Names founded St. Mary's to educate the children of the rough-and-ready mining town of Jacksonville in 1865.
- St. Mary's School is heading in a good direction of global involvement with its language programs, including Chinese for the coming school year, its foreign travel programs, and its overall curriculum, including next year's Challenge 20/20 curriculum and ISA testing.

Challenges:

- St. Mary's School needs to do a better job marketing itself. The Rogue Valley community outside of the St. Mary's community knows the school exists and has a reputation for high academic achievement and some past sports glory, but cannot say much more about the St. Mary's program than that.
- St. Mary's needs to do a better job of making itself relevant in the Rogue Valley through sharing our resources and inviting other groups to partner with us in meaningful projects and activities. We have made some strides in this department this year.
- St. Mary's could stand a new logo and marketing materials that really capture the spirit of the school.

That's a short list from a 300-page report. It gives us much to be proud of, much to maintain, and much to work on in the coming years.