

A Communication Audit of SCC: Analyzing Organizational Culture

Hannah K. Velez

Department of Communication Studies, UNCW

COM 533: Organizational Culture, Identity and Brand

Dr. Carolyn Hinton

October 10, 2025

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
Method	6
Sampling Approach	6
Data Sources	6-7
Analytical Framework	7
Ethical Considerations	8
Audit Diary	8
Stage 1: Data Collection	8
Stage 2: Coding and Analysis	9
Stage 3: Reflection and Triangulation	9
Results	9
Internal Communication Findings	10
External Communication Findings	10
Reflective and Evaluative Findings	11
Findings Summary	11-12

Table of Contents (continued)

Conclusions and Recommendations	12
Recommendation I	12-13
Recommendation II	13-14
Recommendation III	14
References	15-16
Appendix A – Internal Communication Artifacts	17
Appendix B – External Communication Artifacts	18-20
Appendix C – Supervisor Documents	21-22
Appendix D – Reflective Narrative	23

Executive Summary

This communication audit examines the culture and brand alignment of the public relations (PR) team at Southwestern Community College (SCC), a small but dynamic department within a higher education setting. The team's three members act as both the internal communication hub and the external voice of the college, making them central to the institution's reputation and identity. Using a qualitative mixed-method approach informed by Diggs-Brown (2013), this audit analyzed internal emails, text exchanges, a press release, a job recommendation letter and a reflective narrative written after the internship period. Sampling combined purposeful and convenience methods to capture authentic communication moments that represent the team's lived culture. Artifacts were evaluated using three criteria of consistency, inclusiveness and effectiveness to assess how communication practices reinforce organizational identity.

Findings indicate strong alignment between SCC's internal culture and external brand. Communication across all artifacts reflected respect, appreciation, teamwork and professional growth, values mirrored in both internal interactions and public messaging. Supervisory language demonstrated inclusiveness and authentic recognition, while external materials like press releases showcased credibility and warmth. Three recommendations were developed to strengthen communication continuity: (1) formalize recognition practices, (2) increase visibility of team identity in public communications and (3) create an onboarding communication guide to preserve culture as the team evolves. Implementing these steps will help sustain SCC's strengths in authenticity, collaboration and alignment between brand and culture, central to the proposed brand mantra, "Family. Growth. Opportunity."

Introduction

The purpose of this communication audit is to evaluate how the public relations team at Southwestern Community College (SCC) expresses and reinforces the organization's culture and brand through its daily communication practices. As a small, close-knit department, the PR team serves as the connective link between the college's internal community and its external audiences. This dual role makes it a prime example of how internal culture and external branding intersect. The audit's central objective is to determine the degree of alignment between organizational culture, brand identity and communication effectiveness. Specifically, it examines whether internal practices of respect, gratitude and collaboration are reflected consistently in the college's public-facing materials.

Guided by Diggs-Brown's (2013) communication audit framework and Leavy's (2017) sampling principles, this study uses a qualitative, evidence-based approach to analyze how interpersonal and mediated communication shape perceptions of culture and brand authenticity. By analyzing internal artifacts (emails and texts) and external outputs (press releases and social media), the audit identifies recurring themes that represent the PR team's cultural identity. The analysis is grounded in theories of organizational culture, brand relationship management and ethical internal branding. The findings aim to provide actionable insights and practical recommendations to enhance SCC's communication effectiveness, preserve its culture of appreciation and strengthen the integrity of its brand message. Ultimately, this audit contributes to understanding how a small organizational unit, through intentional communication and authentic relationships, can sustain a credible and values-driven brand that aligns culture with organizational mission.

Method

This audit used a mixed qualitative approach guided by Diggs-Brown's (2013) communication audit model, which emphasizes both the structure and meaning of communication across internal and external channels (p. 36). The goal was to assess how Southwestern Community College's public relations (PR) team communicates its culture and brand identity through interpersonal interaction, messaging practices and public-facing content. This small, three-person team serves as both an internal communication hub and the external voice of the college, making it an ideal unit for examining alignment between organizational culture and brand.

Sampling Approach

A purposeful sampling method, as defined by Leavy (2017), was used to identify communication artifacts most representative of the team's collaborative and brand-related activities (pp. 79-80). Because access to organizational materials was limited following the conclusion of the internship, convenience sampling (p. 149) was also used to include available internal communications, such as emails and texts exchanged between the intern, supervisor and colleagues. This mixed sampling strategy aligns with the audit's goal of capturing both the formal and informal dimensions of communication that contribute to culture and brand.

Data Sources

Artifacts were selected from three categories: internal communication (email and text exchanges highlighting collaboration, feedback and recognition practices among team members); external communication (a press release authored by the intern during the internship period, demonstrating how the team represents the college's values and community engagement);

reflective and evaluative materials (a post-internship essay from the intern and job recommendation letter written by the supervisor, providing insight into the organization's leadership style, appreciation culture and mentorship practices). These sources were chosen because they demonstrate how communication practices reinforce key cultural themes of respect, appreciation, teamwork and professional growth. All central to the brand mantra: "Family. Growth. Opportunity."

Analytical Framework

Artifacts were analyzed using three evaluative criteria to determine how communication reflects and reinforces organizational identity:

Consistency:

the degree to which internal and external communication express aligned values, tone and messaging (Owen, 2002, p. 49-50)

Inclusiveness:

the extent to which communication practices involve and respect all members, fostering collaboration and shared voice.

Effectiveness:

the clarity and impact of communication in meeting its intended goals, such as promoting a sense of belonging internally and reinforcing brand identity externally, which emphasizes Fournier's (1998) idea of humanizing the brand (pp. 344-345).

Ethical Considerations

Following Müller's (2016) discussion of brand-centered control, care was taken to ensure that internal communications were analyzed ethically, respecting privacy and acknowledging employees as individuals rather than instruments of the brand (pp. 910-911). This approach aligns with the communication executive's ethical responsibility to balance brand representation with human dignity and autonomy.

Audit Diary

The audit process was completed over several weeks and relied on retrospective analysis of previously collected artifacts from the PR internship at Southwestern Community College (SCC). Data collection began by revisiting communications from my time as an intern, followed by identifying which materials best reflected the organization's internal culture and external brand identity. The selection process followed Diggs-Brown's (2013) guidance that audits should examine how communication practices express and reinforce organizational values (pp. 36-37).

Stage 1: Data Collection

As mentioned, artifacts were organized into three main categories (internal and external communications; evaluative or reflective documents). I created a spreadsheet to track themes and coding categories (e.g., appreciation, teamwork, recognition, opportunity). Because access to organizational data was limited after the internship ended, I applied a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling, ensuring that all selected materials represented meaningful examples of communication tied to the organization's mission and identity.

Stage 2: Coding and Analysis

Each artifact was read multiple times to identify recurring language patterns and tone. Messages were categorized based on the three evaluative criteria (consistency; inclusiveness; effectiveness). For example, the recurring use of affirming language (“thank you so much,” “fantastic”) was coded under appreciation and linked to the internal culture of respect. Phrases in press releases that emphasized community and student achievement were coded under opportunity and growth to evaluate alignment between internal and external communication.

Stage 3: Reflection and Triangulation

Following Testa and Sipe’s (2011) suggestion to use audit findings for organizational improvement (pp. 5-6), I compared coded data from different communication types to test for consistency. I also reflected on my lived experiences to cross-check whether the tone and content of written communications aligned with in-person interactions. Triangulating these data helped ensure reliability and validity, revealing a consistent pattern of respectful, encouraging and mission-driven communication throughout the organization.

Results

The findings from this audit reveal strong alignment between the organization’s internal culture and its external brand identity. The PR team at SCC demonstrates remarkable consistency across communication channels, from internal correspondence to public messaging, suggesting that the organization lives its brand through daily interactions, reinforcing Iglesias & Bonet’s (2012) idea that, “employee actions can make or break the brand,” (p. 252).

Internal Communication Findings

Emails and texts between the intern, supervisor and one colleague reveal a deeply respectful and collaborative environment. Supervisory feedback was consistently positive and framed constructively. A few examples from email exchanges include: “Wow. Just... wow. This is fantastic!” and “Please draft up some text to go with the social post; feel free to come over and brainstorm,” (see Appendix A, Table A1). The first exchange was my supervisor’s response to a social media post I created for one of their programs. The second was in response to photographs I took for a commercial we filmed. These exchanges demonstrate inclusiveness, inviting participation and creative input, and effectiveness through clear, supportive communication. Similarly, messages around schedule adjustments and workload flexibility show compassion and trust. When I expressed needing time to rest before driving due to an eye-straining headache, the supervisor’s immediate response was, “Please feel free to just stay home and rest,” (see Appendix A, Table A2). This level of empathy reflects a culture that prioritizes well-being and mutual respect.

External Communication Findings

The press release announcing nominations for SCC’s Distinguished Alumni Award highlights external messaging that mirrors internal values. Appendix B, Table B1. The release emphasizes recognition, growth and community connection, positioning the college as an organization that celebrates success and invests in its people. This aligns directly with the brand mantra, “Family. Growth. Opportunity,” and demonstrates consistency between the internal ethos and public representation. The language reflects sincerity rather than promotion, enhancing the college’s credibility.

Reflective and Evaluative Findings

The supervisor's job recommendation letter reinforces the organization's internal culture through high praise and emotional authenticity (see Appendix C). The supervisor described me as, "dedicated, organized, productive, and hungry to succeed," and expressed genuine regret that a full-time position could not be offered. This personal tone exemplifies a culture where recognition is both professional and heartfelt. The consistency between this recommendation, the emails and the internship experience signals that gratitude and inclusion are not performative but are deeply embedded cultural values. My reflective essay provides confirmation from the employee perspective, describing my working relationship with my supervisor as, "great," and with the entire team as, "heavily supported," (see Appendix D). I also expressed the team's contribution to my growth. This narrative demonstrates alignment between personal experience and the organization's intended brand identity.

Findings Summary

The audit findings indicate a high degree of consistency across all communication artifacts. Shared language centered on respect, gratitude and teamwork appeared in both internal and external messages, demonstrating strong alignment between the organization's culture and brand. This consistency reinforces credibility and trust in the institution's public identity. Evidence of inclusiveness emerged throughout the artifacts, particularly in examples where the supervisor invited collaboration and actively implemented intern input in social media projects. Such practices signal a culture that values contribution from all members, regardless of position, and supports shared ownership of communication outcomes. The organization displayed notable effectiveness in its communication practices. The tone across messages was clear and supportive, external press materials projected authenticity and recognition, and internal correspondence

motivated and empowered staff. Collectively, these elements show that communication within the organization achieves its intended goals of motivation, recognition and public trust. Overall, the organization excels in authenticity. The harmony between who they say they are and how they behave reinforces a strong, ethical brand identity (Stride, 2006, pp. 117-118, 121).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This culture-focused communication audit concludes that the SCC PR team's internal communication culture is highly aligned with its external brand identity. The organization's success stems from its lived values (appreciation, respect, collaboration, opportunity) which are consistently reflected across communication channels. This alignment enhances employee engagement and reinforces brand credibility. However, maintaining alignment requires intentional effort, particularly as teams evolve or expand. To sustain and strengthen the communication culture, three actionable recommendations are proposed, following Edgar Schein's (1997) model of process consultation and Sue DeWine's (1994) framework for descriptive feedback, offering actionable steps that preserve the organization's authenticity while supporting continuous cultural growth.

Recommendation I

Strengthen internal recognition practices through intentional communication. Develop a consistent and visible recognition system to celebrate both small and large accomplishments across the communications team, reinforcing the organization's culture of gratitude and mutual respect.

Support

Feedback gathered from emails and my personal narrative demonstrates that appreciation is already a defining feature of the organization's culture. However, much of this recognition occurs informally through one-on-one conversations or quick email exchanges. Building a structured, yet personal recognition practice, like a monthly highlight email or "team appreciation moment" during meetings would help sustain morale and ensure that all members feel equally valued. As Schein (1997) suggests, effective consultants help organizations uncover and strengthen existing positive processes rather than impose new systems (p. 207). By formalizing this practice collaboratively, leaders can preserve the authenticity of the team's culture while ensuring that recognition remains inclusive and consistent over time. This approach also models DeWine's (1994) emphasis on descriptive feedback, acknowledging behaviors and results that align with organizational values without resorting to judgment or comparison (p. 245-247).

Recommendation II

Increase visibility of team identity in external communications. Integrate behind-the-scenes storytelling and staff-centered content into external communication channels to reinforce the alignment between internal culture and the college's brand of family, opportunity and growth.

Support

I do recall doing one social post for the organization showing behind-the-scenes of their commercials (see Appendix B). My analysis of press releases and social media artifacts indicates that the organization effectively promotes community engagement and student success but rarely highlight the teamwork and dedication driving those outcomes. Including more internal

perspectives, like short staff features or collaborative project spotlights, would bridge the internal brand (family-oriented and supportive) with the public-facing image of opportunity and growth. This aligns with Schein's (1997) concept of "joint" ownership, where consultants and clients co-create understanding and solutions, ensuring authenticity in how the organization represents itself (p. 206). As well, it fulfills DeWine's principle of descriptive recommendations by focusing on observable alignment, demonstrating how showcasing internal collaboration can enhance brand consistency and authenticity across audiences (p. 247).

Recommendation III

Develop a structured onboarding communication process that introduces new team members to the organization's culture, brand values and preferred communication practices.

Support

The audit revealed that much of the team's culture is transmitted informally through interpersonal interactions rather than written materials or structured processes. While this works well for a small, close-knit team, it risks inconsistency as new members join or roles shift. Creating a brief onboarding guide or mentorship system would help new employees internalize the organization's values from the start, maintaining alignment between brand and culture. Schein (1997) explains that at the individual level, interventions like training and mentoring help employees become more effective participants in their organizations (pp. 2–3). Likewise, DeWine (1994) notes that consultants should view feedback as a mechanism for helping clients learn and align their behaviors with their intentions (pp. 249-250). By documenting best practices and communication norms, the organization can safeguard its strengths in collaboration and respect while ensuring the brand identity remains consistent over time.

References

- Barbara Diggs-Brown (2013). Communication Audits. In Barbara Diggs-Brown, *The PR Style Guide* (36-42). Boston, MA: Wadsworth CENGAGE Learning.
- Edgar H. Schein (1997). The Concept of "Client" from a Process Consultation Perspective: A Guide for Change Agents. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 10(3): 202-216.
- Helen Stride (2006). An Investigation into the Values Dimensions of Branding: Implications for the Charity Sector. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 11: 115-124.
- Mark R. Testa and Lori J. Sipe (July, 2011). The Organizational Culture Audit: A Model for Hospitality Executives. *International CHRIE Conference-Refereed Track*. Published by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst.
- Mike Owen (2002). Branding and Brand Modeling. *In Developing Brands with Qualitative Market Research*. 43-58.
- Monika Müller (2016). 'Brand-Centred Control': A Study of Internal Branding and Normative Control. *Organization Studies* 38(7): 895-915.
- Oriol Iglesias & Eduard Bonet (2012). *Persuasive Brand Management: How Managers Can Influence Brand Meaning When They are Losing Control Over It*. Journal of

Organizational Change Management 25(2): 251-264.

Patricia Leavy (2017). Sampling. In Patricia Leavy, *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches*. Guilford Publications.

Sue DeWine (1994). How Do You Tell Clients What Kind of Job They are Doing? Using Descriptive Feedback. In *The Consultant's Craft: Improving Organizational Communication*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

Susan Fournier (1998). *Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research*. Journal of Consumer Research 24(4): 343-373.

Velez, H. (2025, February 12). Nominations open for SCC's Distinguished Alumni Award. Smoky Mountain News. <https://smokymountainnews.com/archives/item/39072-nominations-open-for-scc-s-distinguished-alumni-award>

Velez, H. (2025). Internship Essay. Unpublished manuscript, Western Carolina University.

Appendix A

Internal Communication Artifacts

The following presents internal email and text message excerpts that demonstrate how feedback, collaboration and appreciation are communicated within the organization's public relations team. These artifacts show how everyday interactions reflect inclusiveness and respect, reinforcing a consistent culture of professionalism and mutual support.

Email from supervisor	Context	Interpretation
“Wow. Just... wow. This is fantastic! The timing is spot on – everything about it just pops.”	Supervisor’s response to a social media post created for one of the college’s academic programs.	Illustrates recognition-based communication that supports a culture of appreciation and motivation .
“Please draft up some text to go with the social post; feel free to come over and brainstorm.”	Message inviting collaborative input during social content development.	Demonstrates inclusiveness and respect for all contributors, regardless of role.

Table A1. *Emails from supervisor, context and interpretation.*

Text from supervisor	Context	Interpretation
“Please feel free to just stay home and rest. Hope you feel better soon.”	Supervisor response to illness notification.	Reflects compassionate leadership and genuine concern for employee well-being.

Table A2. *Text messages supervisor, context and interpretation.*


Appendix B


External Communication Artifacts

This section includes public-facing materials, such as a published [press release](#) and social media content. These artifacts illustrate how the organization’s values of recognition, opportunity and community engagement are translated into external messaging, maintaining strong alignment with the internal culture.

Excerpt
<p>“Southwestern Community College is now accepting nominations for the SCC Foundation’s seventh-annual Distinguished Alumni Award. ‘We have thousands of amazing alumni throughout and beyond our service area, and we’re always extremely impressed by the quality of nominations we receive for this honor,’ said Dr. Mark Ellison, SCC’s Dean of Students. . . In addition to being recognized during commencement, this year’s recipient of the Distinguished Alumni Award will be mentioned on SCC’s website and social media, will receive an award plaque and \$250 from the SCC Foundation.”</p>
Context
<p>This press release announces SCC’s annual recognition of alumni achievement. It celebrates graduates who have made meaningful contributions to their communities and highlights the ongoing relationship between the college and its alumni network.</p>
Interpretation
<p>This artifact embodies the college’s proposed brand mantra of "Family. Growth. Opportunity." By spotlighting alumni success, the release communicates growth (career and academic advancement), opportunity (education as a pathway) and family (ongoing community connection). Its tone is professional yet warm, aligning with the organization’s internal culture of appreciation and recognition. The inclusion of real alumni stories reinforces authenticity and credibility, supporting the finding that SCC’s external communications consistently mirror its internal values of collaboration, gratitude and respect.</p>

Table B1. *Excerpt from [press release](#), context and interpretation.*

 **southwesterncc**
1,713 followers [View profile](#)



[View more on Instagram](#)

♡ 💬 ↗ 📌

southwesterncc

Behind-the-scenes 📸 of our newest commercial to promote our table gaming program! From interviews to blackjack, it took all hands-on-deck 🙌 to get the dice rolling 🎲 We can't wait for you to see all the benefits this program brings. It's no game of roulette if you're guaranteed a win... 🎰

-

#BehindTheScenes #BTS #TableGaming
#SouthwesternCommunityCollege #SCC #HarrahsCherokeeCasino

Figure B1. *Behind-the-scenes social post for SCC program commercial*

Caption	Context	Interpretation
<p>“Behind-the-scenes 🎬 of our newest commercial to promote our table gaming program! From interviews to blackjack, it took all hands-on-deck 🙌 to get the dice rolling 🎲 We can’t wait for you to see all the benefits this program brings. It’s no game of roulette if you’re guaranteed a win... 🎰”</p>	<p>This social post offered a glimpse into the creation of promotional content for SCC’s Health Sciences department.</p>	<p>This artifact reflects transparency and authenticity, key values of the organization’s communication strategy. By highlighting behind-the-scenes work, the post reinforces the collaborative, human-side of the brand while strengthening connection with audiences. It demonstrates that internal teamwork and public messaging are aligned through consistent tone and values.</p>

Table B2. *Caption, context and interpretation of Behind-the-scenes social post for SCC program commercial*

Appendix C

Supervisor Documents

The following contains a formal document of a job recommendation letter written by the supervisor. This artifact captures how recognition and professional development are embedded in leadership communication, providing a managerial perspective that supports audit findings.



Public Relations
 447 College Drive • Sylva, North Carolina 28779
 Phone: 828.339.4394 • Fax: 828.339.4613
www.southwesterncc.edu

Aug. 11, 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am writing today to wholeheartedly endorse Hannah Velez for employment in the areas of Communications, Marketing or Public Relations within your organization.

Over the years, we have hosted in the neighborhood of 20 interns from Western Carolina University's outstanding Communications Department. I can say without reservation that none were as dedicated, organized, productive and hungry to succeed as Hannah.

This young lady showed up early every single day and regularly kept me apprised of her progress on the projects she'd been assigned. She approached every task as if it was the most important assignment she'd ever received, and she welcomed feedback and advice that would help her learn and grow.

All three members of our team worked closely with her, and we all found Hannah to be a delightful, pleasant and courteous colleague.

My only regret is that we weren't able to create a new full-time position to keep her here.

If you have any questions at all about Hannah, please feel free to give me a call anytime on my cell phone: 828.593.2879, or send me an email: t_goode@SouthwesternCC.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tyler Norris Goode".

Tyler Norris Goode, Director of Public Relations
 Southwestern Community College
 828.339.4394 (office)
 828.593.2879 (mobile)
t_goode@SouthwesternCC.edu

Figure C1. *Job recommendation letter from supervisor*

Excerpt	Interpretation
<p>“ . . .dedicated, organized, productive and hungry to succeed. This young lady. . . approached every task as if it was the most important assignment she’d ever received. . . she welcomed feedback and advice that would help her learn and grow. . . My only regret is that we weren’t able to create a new full-time position to keep her here.”</p>	<p>Demonstrates a culture of personal recognition, opportunity, and emotional authenticity. This artifact mirrors the appreciation and encouragement seen across other communication channels.</p>

Table C1. *Excerpt from and interpretation on job recommendation letter from supervisor.*

Appendix D

Reflective Narrative

This section includes a reflective essay written after completing the internship. The narrative provides first-person evidence of how the organization’s culture was experienced daily, confirming that the values expressed internally and externally are genuinely lived within the workplace.

I had a great working relationship with my supervisor, Tyler Goode. He gave clear direction, reviewed my work and helped me grow. We discussed my mid-term evaluation and final evaluation, both receiving exceptional feedback. His one suggestion is that I continue sharing my compassion with others, as it is a trait that can easily diminish overtime. I had a positive experience with the rest of the team as well – [REDACTED] Because our team consisted of only three members, not including myself, I was heavily supported. I received one-on-one time with everyone who requested my help on projects. As well, I had some networking opportunities during the internship. I had the opportunity to work with SilverWolf Studios on each commercial they produced for SCC. I even show up in one and can be seen in various pictures on their [website](#).

Figure D1: Screenshot from personal narrative essay following the internship.

Excerpt	Interpretation
<p>“I had a great working relationship with my supervisor, Tyler Goode. He gave clear direction, reviewed my work and helped me grow... Because our team consisted of only three members, not including myself, I was heavily supported. I received one-on-one time with everyone who requested my help on projects.”</p>	<p>This reflection corroborates the organizational themes identified throughout the audit (collaboration, recognition, opportunity). It validates the consistency between lived experience and the organization’s communicated values, demonstrating a strong alignment between culture and brand.</p>

Table D1. Excerpt from and interpretation of narrative essay following the internship.