



Vision 2020 Athletics Committee Report Fall 2016



Overview -

This document outlines a strategic model for Belmont Athletics that sets our priorities, focuses our energy and resources, and strengthens our operations, in order to engage the campus community and other stakeholders with our student-athletes and athletic teams. The document was completed on November 30, 2016, by individuals representing different interests in the Belmont Community.

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Facilitators: Ted Peetz, Assistant Professor of Sport Administration; Jamie Zeller, Director of Fitness and Recreation

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Vision 2020 Charge -

Belmont University has successfully cultivated a culture of academic and athletic success among our student athletes. Having moved from the Atlantic Sun Conference to the Ohio Valley Conference, our teams have competed well on the field, winning several conference championships, and have continued their success in the classroom. At the same time, while game attendance has been increasing, we believe that engagement of faculty, staff and students with our athletic programs could be better. In addition, we think that the message our athletes bring to the Nashville community – strong leadership, excellence on the field and in the classroom, and service to Nashville and the world – are messages and initiatives that need to be shared and developed broadly.

Project Objectives -

- Research and document current opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to engage with Athletics at events, as well as outside on game days.
- Provide a recommendation to Senior Leadership that includes steps required over the next six months to more fully engage the campus community in Belmont Athletics and to engage Belmont Athletics with the Nashville community.

Athletic Committee Progression –

Draft charters were distributed and team members were selected on August 30th. The Athletics Committee's first meeting was held on September 13th and met weekly thereafter. During the course of these meetings sub-groups were created, and met regularly, to examine the needs concerning our three main stakeholders: faculty/staff, students, and the Nashville community. The committee met with Dr. Paula Gill on two occasions, and with our lead contact, Mr. Scott Corley, a handful of times, to refocus and gain clarity.

Engagement as a broad term was used throughout the development of this report. The committee viewed this term ultimately as one that increased fan satisfaction, raised attendance for all sports, and promoted growth of the Bruins Athletics brand.

The following pages outline our recommendations to generate and sustain fan engagement through

- Community, Faculty, Staff, and Student Involvement
- Fan Development
- Fan Relations

It is the committee's hope that during the next six months, and into the remaining years of Vision 2020, the strategies outlined in this report will be given a sincere investment of time, effort, and resources.

Research

The committee reviewed a number of research materials for this report including: the June and August V2020 summits focus group notes, season ticket holder survey, student “MOB” survey, faculty/staff Qualtrics survey, CIRP Freshman survey report, and informal interviews. A major takeaway from the analysis of the available research materials was that there was a significant lack of useable data. In addition, a good portion of the research was qualitative in nature (focus groups, open-ended questionnaire answers) which made generalizing the data difficult. A recommendation of the committee is to have institutional research conduct benchmark surveys with important stakeholders so more data-driven decisions can be made. For example, currently no baseline data exists on student perceptions/engagement with athletics. The committee conducted a faculty/staff Qualtrics survey during the creation of this document to gain perspective of this stakeholder group. The committee recommends the same be done for incoming and exiting students to provide a clearer picture into what role athletics plays in their college experience. The lack of data helped to shape a number of our recommendations and inspired the development of the *Belmont Fan Engagement Model* which is discussed in greater detail in this document.

Research Breakdown-

Below is a summary of the relevant data that was pulled from the available research.

V2020 Summits (n= 200+)

- Improve game day entertainment by utilizing student musical talent
- Address food venues and concession stand operations
- Create program in which various departments, colleges, and residence halls adopt and support teams throughout their season
- Build relationships with external stakeholders that will increase attendance at games (church groups, schools, youth sports, Fellowship of Christian Athletes)
- Focus on building student interest in athletic teams in the same way we approach introducing students to music opportunities
- Increase Athletics presence at Preview Days and Towering Traditions Orientation sessions for potential and incoming students and parents
- Promote Athletics as an integral part of the student life experience
- Increase shuttle service to Rose Park for students, faculty, and staff to attend games
- Promote student-athletes as more than just “student-athletes” by showcasing academic achievements, servant leadership, and sports evangelism
- Adjust start times to games to make them more family friendly

Season Ticket Holder Survey (n= 107)

- Care about concession quality and access
- Enhance Game Day experience through updates at Curb Event Center (video boards, sound system)
- Use website and Bruins newsletter for their info

Student “MOB” Survey 2015 (n=249)

- Most students attended 2 or fewer fall and spring semester games
- Along with socializing with friends, free food, concert tickets, t-shirts, and prize incentives were most popular for encouraging attendance
- Students desired an app to incentivize attendance at games
- A-frame signs and word of mouth were the top 2 recognized forms of advertising about games
- Social media and BelmontBruins.com were top 2 places students go for schedules
- 50% would ride the shuttle more often if it was offered consistently to Rose Park

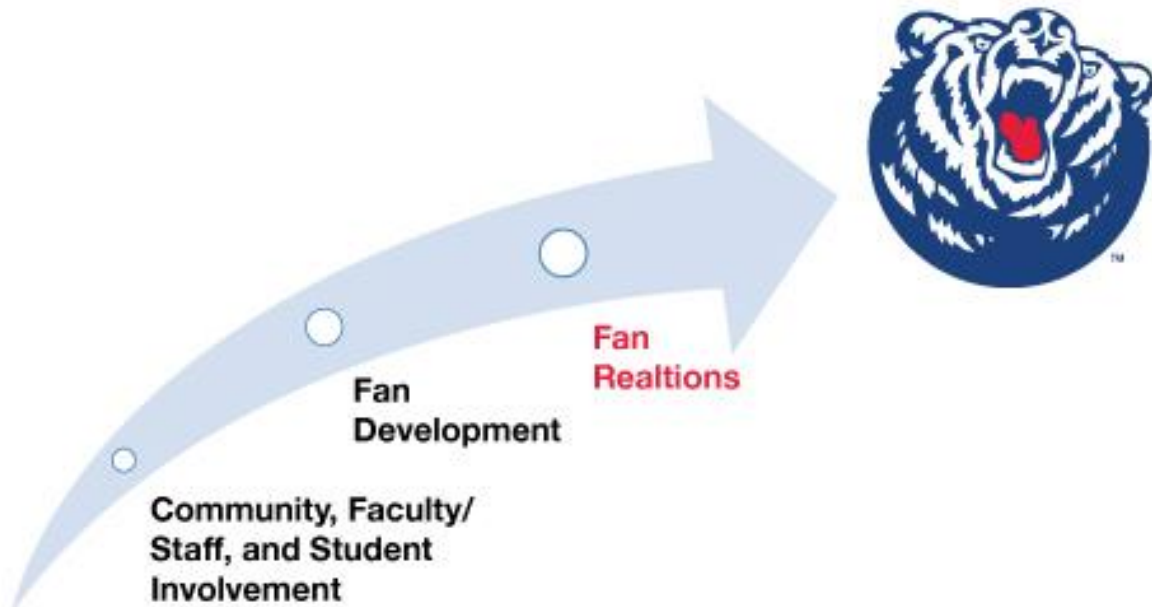
Qualtrics Faculty/Staff Survey (n= 238)

- Over 30% of the respondents were indifferent when it came to concessions and guest services
- Over half of the respondents noted that they have attended 0 games or 1 game last year
- Some were concerned about safety at Rose Park,
- Roughly 50% of the respondents would use the Bruin app for game information, however almost 70% were unaware it even exists

CIRP Freshman Survey Report 2000-2015 (n= 10,395)

- One question asks “How much time did you spend on the following activities per week?” (Exercise/-Sports) being an option. The committee felt this question made little connection with game attendance or engagement with Belmont Athletics
- No other question on the survey addressed Athletics

Belmont Fan Engagement Model



The *Belmont Fan Engagement Model* addresses Belmont Athletics consumption from a fan experience perspective, showing the need for tailored marketing communications determined by the participant’s position within the engagement ladder.

- Community, Faculty, Staff, and Student Involvement- Supports creation of our “Brand Story” and ways to share that story with the Nashville Community.
- Fan Development- Advances the level of awareness and involvement for prospective fans to one of engagement and consumption (i.e. attending games, purchasing tickets).
- Fan Relations- Examines the engagement efforts of the game day experience and looks at ways to provide the best fan experience in Nashville.

Starting at the lowest level of engagement, *Community, Faculty, Staff, and Student Involvement*, there are those who are unaware of the Belmont Athletics product. At this base level, more mass targeting strategies need to take place, including the introduction of the Belmont Brand narrative to this population. As Community, Faculty, Staff, and Student involvement increases, a prospective fan moves into *Fan Development*, where strategic communication initiatives begin to shape consumption behaviors (e.g., purchasing tickets/attending games). Finally, *Fan Relations* looks to ultimately strengthen current and future fans through the use of a comprehensive customer relationship management system, an

enhanced game day experience, and other targeted marketing activities. The end result of this model is the creation of a ***lifelong Bruin Fan*** who shows their engagement through event attendance, connectedness with the university, and ultimately serving as a Belmont brand ambassador.

Another way to conceptualize this model is to compare it to the “Admissions Funnel” which is often discussed when describing the process a prospective student experiences as they work their way through the college selection process. The admissions funnel has long been a valued tool for undergraduate recruitment and marketing. This funnel has served as a way to gauge student intent, return-on-investment, and provide a reasonable model to forecast future enrollments. Our *Belmont Fan Engagement Model* works in a similar way by drawing from prospective fans through our brand story, increasing consumption, and ultimately creating lifelong fans.

The remaining sections of this report will outline the strategies recommended by the committee for each of the stages in the model.

Belmont Fan Engagement Model



<p>Stage 1: Fan Involvement</p>	<p>Create our Brand Story, Share our Story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Strategy #1</u>: Develop a strategic marketing plan focused on creating a brand story and finding new ways to tell that story to the Nashville community. • <u>Strategy #2</u>: Identify organizations/partnerships to engage with brand story. • <u>Strategy #3</u>: Create “Street Team” to support branding efforts to greater community.
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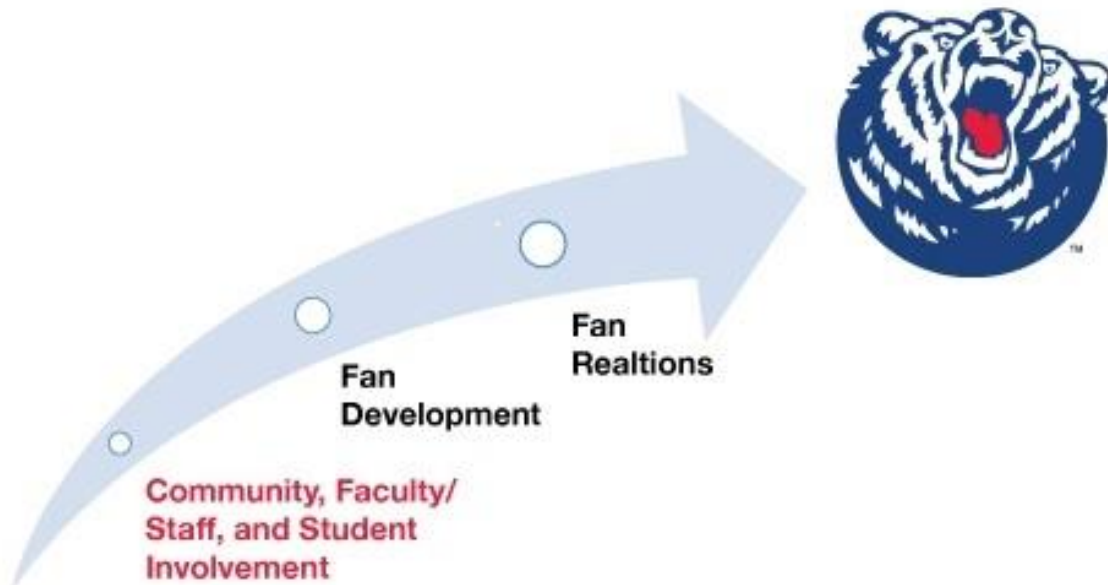
<p>Stage 2: Fan Development</p>	<p>Identify Prospective Fans through Strategic Communication Initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Strategy #4</u>: Engage organizations with newly created brand communication plan. • <u>Strategy #5</u>: Create Admissions-specific marketing communication concerning athletics. • <u>Strategy #6</u>: Create Kids Club. • <u>Strategy #7</u>: Develop on-campus promotional efforts to engage fans.
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<p>Stage 3: Fan Relations</p>	<p>Making Belmont Athletics “The Best Fan Experience in Nashville”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Strategy #8</u>: Create a more fan-friendly Game Day website. • <u>Strategy #9</u>: Expand efforts for customer relations/ guest services. • <u>Strategy #10</u>: Update Customer Relations Management (CRM) System.
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Stage 1

Community, Faculty, Staff and Student Involvement

Create our Brand Story, Share our Brand Story



Community, Faculty, Staff and Student Involvement

In the *Bruin Fan Engagement Model*, Community, Faculty, Staff, and Student Involvement begins with the creation of our brand story and looks for ways to share that story with the greater Nashville Community. As noted in the committee's charge the "strong leadership, excellence on the field and in the classroom, and service to Nashville and the world" narrative needs to be fully developed with the goal of sharing what is great and exciting about our program to the rest of the community. Ultimately this story will affect how fans, media, and the community perceive Belmont Athletics.

Strategy #1: *Develop a strategic marketing plan focused on creating a brand story and finding new ways to tell that story to the Nashville community.*

- Partner with University Marketing and Public Relations to create a Belmont Bruins brand strategy to be used by all teams
 - Within the *Bruin Fan Engagement Model*, the community involvement action begins with outreach. Currently, the athletic program lacks a concise and targeted brand story to share with stakeholders. We must tout what makes Belmont Athletics different from other competitors in the marketplace. By working with University Marketing, athletics must start their marketing strategy with a developed brand narrative
- Conduct audit of efforts currently used to support fan involvement. Work with Institutional Research to gauge perceptions of incoming students, faculty, staff, and community with the athletic program
 - Baseline data will be used to continually evaluate efforts made by the athletic department to better engage stakeholders. This includes: baseline and student exit surveys, community research at outreach events, faculty and staff engagement data, and other data collection opportunities

Strategy #2: Identify organizations and partnerships to engage with Brand Story.

Once a concerted effort is made to create the Bruin brand story, steps should be taken to identify organizations that would be most receptive to hearing it.

- Utilize community involvement initiatives as promotional opportunities for Belmont Athletics
 - Although efforts are made by athletic teams to engage with the community, the committee recommends a more strategic approach. Athletic teams should be equipped with targeted promotional materials when engaging with different community groups. For example, when a team is asked to read to an elementary school, they should be armed with promotional materials to handout, specific ticket offers, and other branding pieces aimed at this demographic. These

promotional materials, handouts and other engagement activities should be developed out of the strategic marketing plan from Strategy #1

- An effort should also be made to have a central outreach or engagement contact within the athletic department to handle community involvement requests. This person would serve as the liaison to the teams and ensure that appropriate marketing materials are available and are consistent across the athletic department. This person would also work to oversee the “Street Team” discussed below

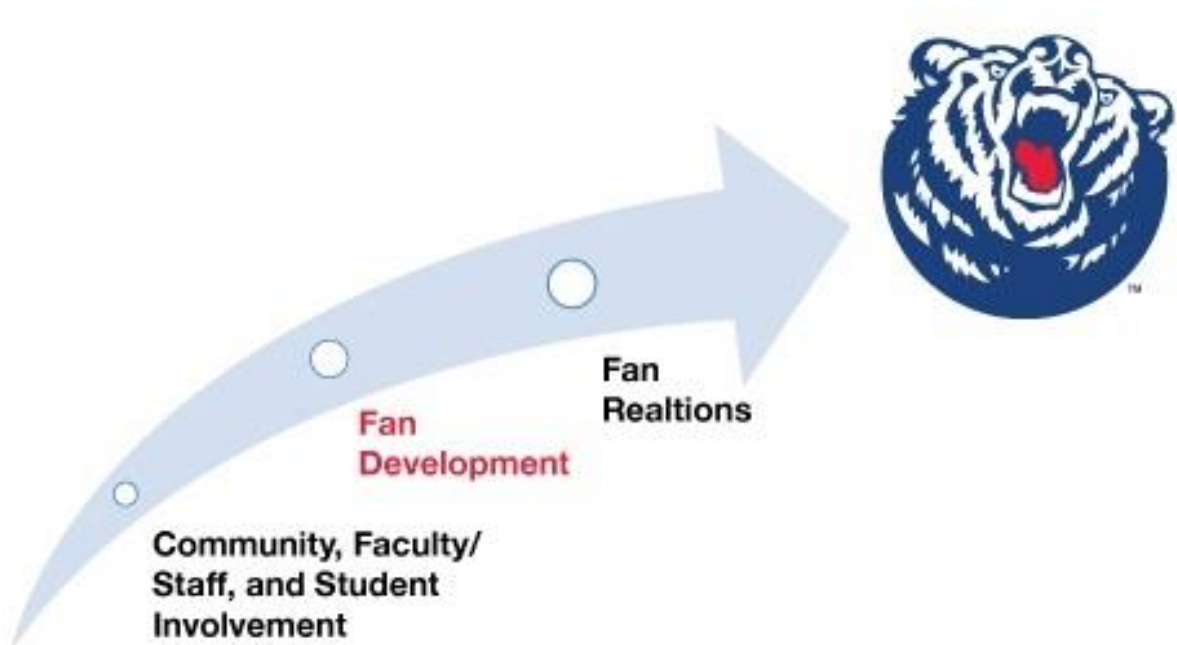
Strategy #3: Creation of “Street Team” to support branding efforts to greater community.

- The committee recommends the creation of a “Street Team” made up of graduate and undergraduate students (noting the opportunity for work study or graduate assistants) to be used to interact with community at local events such as youth sport leagues, community fairs, church and school events
- This “Street Team” will work at a grassroots level to engage with key potential stakeholders in the community. The committee recommends resources be directed to this group to provide community organizations with marketing materials, promotional giveaways, discounted or free ticket promotions, etc.
- This team will also help coordinate with athletic teams to ensure that student-athlete involvement within the community is done in a strategic manner to maximize goodwill and fan engagement

Stage 2

Fan Development

Identify Prospective Fans through Strategic Communication Initiatives



Fan Development

Fan Development in the *Bruin Fan Engagement Model* looks to move the level of awareness and involvement for prospective fans to one of engagement and consumption (i.e. attending games, purchasing tickets).

Strategy #4: Approach/Contact organizations with newly created brand communication plan to encourage ticket purchase, attendance and engagement with Belmont Athletics.

Strategy #5: Create Admissions-specific marketing communication concerning athletics.

There is a need to purposefully engage our prospective and current students with Belmont Athletics since they will be far less likely to be engaged post-graduation if they don't feel connected during their time at Belmont.

- Examine current efforts during campus tours, Preview Days, and Towering Traditions Orientation sessions, and Admissions materials to gauge how Athletics can play a larger role during student recruitment efforts
- Develop a Preview Day that is directly associated with an Athletics event
 - Create additional college-specific (CLASS, LAW, MCB, Etc...) Preview Days that incorporate a Saturday Basketball game in order to introduce Belmont Athletics to prospective students

Strategy #6: Create a Kids Club to promote Belmont Athletics to the next generation.

The Kids Club serves as a way to draw in families and build lifelong fans in the *Bruin Fan Engagement Model*.

- Program would include special newsletter, discounted tickets offers, exclusive Kids Club events, Bruiser appearances, and "membership kit"

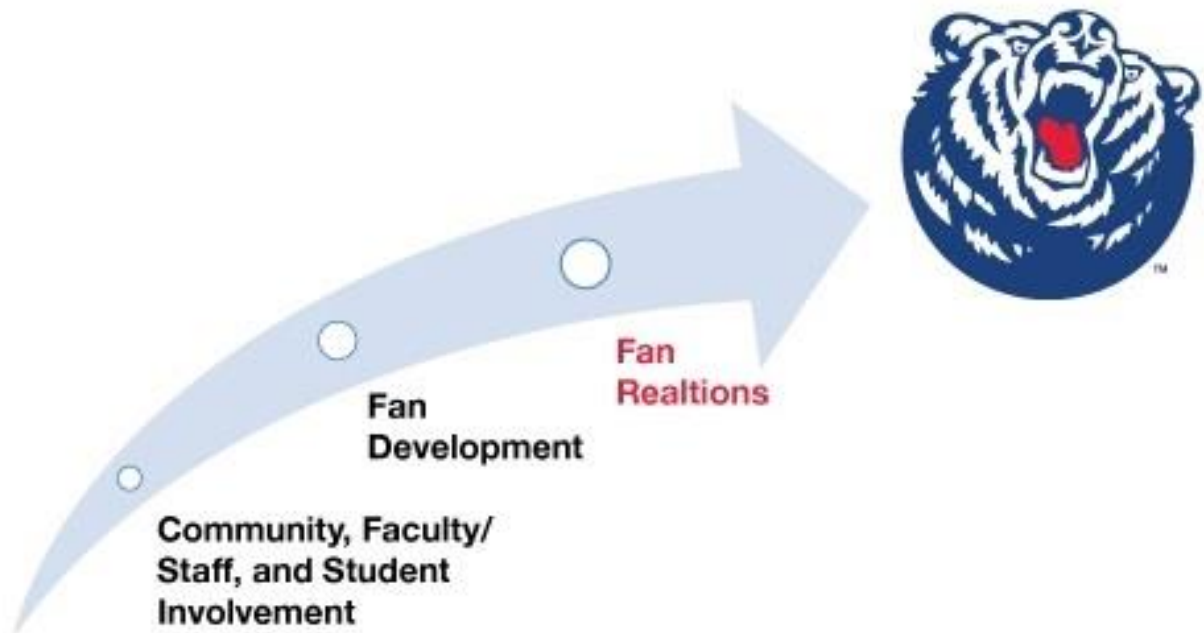
Strategy #7: Development of on-campus promotional efforts to engage fans

- TV installation in common areas (e.g. Curb Café) to showcase Belmont Athletic events and schedule
- A "Hoop Hour" event, similar to the Hoop Hour held for season ticket holders and supports, geared towards students held in the cafeteria
- Distribute *Bruin Insider* campus-wide to all students/faculty/staff (flip the current method of "opting in to receive the *Insider*" to requiring a trackable "opt out" of Athletic Department communication)
- Implement a College/Department "Adopt-a-Team" Program
- Identify resources needed to allow Bruiser to more visible

Stage 3

Fan Relations

Making Belmont Athletics “The Best Fan Experience in Nashville”



Fan Relations

A key component to developing lifelong fans is to provide first class customer service. Fan Relations examines the engagement efforts of the game day experience and looks at ways to provide the best fan experience in Nashville. This will be an ongoing process of identifying and creating new value with individual fans over the lifetime of their association with Belmont Athletics. In addition, these strategies will develop strong relationships with season ticket holders and other key supporters through customized communications, events, and programs to maximize relationships with the most loyal Belmont supporters.

Strategy #8: Creation of a more fan-friendly Game Day website.

Website will be used to promote events as well as provide instruction on parking, dining options on campus, and other game day activities.

Strategy #9: Increased efforts for customer relations/guest service

- Utilize campus resources to enhance game day experience
 - Partner with Sodexo and offer a “kids eat free” opportunity in the cafeteria for each paying adult
 - Create sandwich board “Event Parking” signs directing traffic to Johnson Center Parking Garage to ease pressure on the Curb Garage
 - Provide greater clarification/signage to direct people to appropriate entrances
 - Create Fan Relations student employee positions that will assist visitors before, during, and after the game
 - Create a Fan Relations Team focused on fan retention through proactive communication, including increased personalized touch points through phone calls, emails, events, post-game follow ups, and other communication channels
 - Create Fan Relations kiosks within the venue to assist fans
 - Increased investment in Bruin Rewards App

Strategy #10: Update Customer Relations Management (CRM) System

Currently, the management of customer relationships within the ticketing office is accomplished through an excel spreadsheet. The outdated system has hindered customer communication and engagement. The committee recommends upgrading the current CRM system to allow for more targeted marketing communications and tracking of our ticket purchasers. This CRM should include:

- A 360-degree view of our customers' ticketing, donation, and purchase history in order to enhance each customer relationship, fan engagement opportunity, and maximize revenue potential
- A multi-channel marketing solution able to deliver customized marketing experiences and campaigns for each fan
- Integrated social media marketing to allow the Ticket Office and Athletic Department to engage customers and efficiently manage all social media channels. The CRM should also offer social media experiences in-venue and on-website aimed at improving fan engagement and experience
- Increased investment in Bruin Rewards App
- A donor management system that seamlessly integrates Bruin Club donor management with Ticket Office, CRM, marketing and analytics systems

Belmont Fan Engagement Timeline

Ongoing

- Communicate newly created brand communication plan
- Expand customer relations/guest services efforts
- Advance Bruin Rewards Application
- Develop Bruin Rewards application

0 – 6 months

- Survey climate survey/perform opportunities assessment
- Update CRM system and expand vendor options
- Develop strategic marketing plan
- Optimize Game Day website and partnerships
- Maximize *Bruin Insider* communications
- Identify and collaborate with on and off campus organizations/partnerships

6 months – 2020

- Review and audit current fan development strategies and communication
- Develop “Street Team”
- Create Admissions-specific marketing
- Create Kids Club

References

1. Initial Letter of Invitation to join Committee
2. Vision 2020 Summits (June and August 2016)
3. Season Ticket Holder Survey (May 2016)
4. Student “MOB” Survey (May 2016)
5. CIRP Freshman Survey Report (2000-2015)
6. Faculty/Staff Qualtrics Survey (October 2016)
7. Discussions with Nashville Predators fan service representatives (September 2016)
8. Interview Megan Henderson, Assistant Director – Fan, Campus and Community Engagement at Miami University (October 2016)
9. Discussions with Western Kentucky Athletic Department staff (October 2016)
10. Darlow, J. (2015). Brands win championships. Portland, Oregon: Jack and Jane Publishing.