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# Behind the W: Brand Ambassador Program

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# Behind the **W**

## Brand Ambassador Program

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### Why the *Behind the W* Program?

Increasing awareness of and appreciation for WMU, as understood and promoted through our brand, is part of the University's Strategic Plan. WMU employs more than 3,000 faculty and staff – and each plays a key role internally and externally in promotion of that brand.

The *Behind the W* program was conceived as a way to bring clarity and consistency to the WMU brand and voice. It also was seen as a means to help increase faculty and staff understanding of their role in communicating the WMU story.

A “brand” is an amalgam of our reputation, our people, and our vision and mission. We so believe in who we are as an institution of higher education, that we have a “brand promise.”

**Brand Promise:**  
 “WMU students are successful in life and work because of WMU's quality programs and the commitment of its people. Alumni are our best evidence.”

### Institutional Models WMU has referenced in building its *Behind the W* program

Both Virginia Tech University and Rutgers University implemented forms of branding programs at their institutions, largely in the acknowledgement that the faculty and staff at these institutions were the front door for many outsiders. That is, if an institution wishes to impact its image in the larger community in which it resides, it will need “ambassadors” at all levels speaking for the institution.

With that, WMU quickly realized it needed a program to help equip its employees for interactions within and outside the University. The natural birthing place for such a program came from the Integrated Marketing Team (IMT), an University-wide committee of communicators and marketing professionals who already worked to build mutually beneficial relationships between their offices and key constituents within and outside the campus.

The key take-away learned from Rutgers and Virginia Tech was the importance of educating and communicating with employees about the institution's brand and goal objectives.

To quote our colleagues, “It's one thing to launch your brand and come up with a communication plan; it's quite another to get buy-in from those who must continue the momentum long after the initial excitement and campus buzz die down.”

WMU launched its Grab the Reins and Smart Ride campaigns, but the real success of these campaigns will rest with University buy-in and support from all employees, from the landscapers to the faculty who teach and research with our students, and everyone in between.

WMU's brand is its name and reputation: we all play a part in communicating our commitment to our students' success.

### Purpose of the *Behind the W* program

Our employees are our most valuable asset. With that, it is the goal to invest in our faculty and staff development so as to foster the reputation of the University and to ensure a diverse, inclusive and healthy community. To that end, we proposed developing three workshops on the fundamentals of the WMU brand so that communication with key constituents well.

Furthermore, research shows that employee morale is rooted in employees being empowered and well-equipped to do their jobs and to feel appreciated.

With this, the three workshops were designed to cover the following:

- Understanding of the WMU identity
- Understanding WMU audiences and ways to communicate with them
- Understanding WMU communication guideline and standards

### Goals and objectives

- Increased awareness of best practices for communicating within and on behalf of the University
- Developing consistent messages and communication plans that enhance departmental/unit image and reduce wasted effort
- Efficient sharing of resources between departments across the University
- Community-building between professionals, departments/units across University/regional locations

### Assessment

After each workshop and each session, the participants completed a detailed survey. In the survey, they were asked to rate the workshop on the basis of its achievement in three general categories of questions: 1. achievement of each objective for that workshop (e.g. in workshop 1, the objectives included increased awareness of the University history, awareness of how to be an ambassador for the University in your job and in community, and awareness of the “community of WMU” and what that means); 2. Usefulness of the information presented; and, 3. Overall value of the workshop.

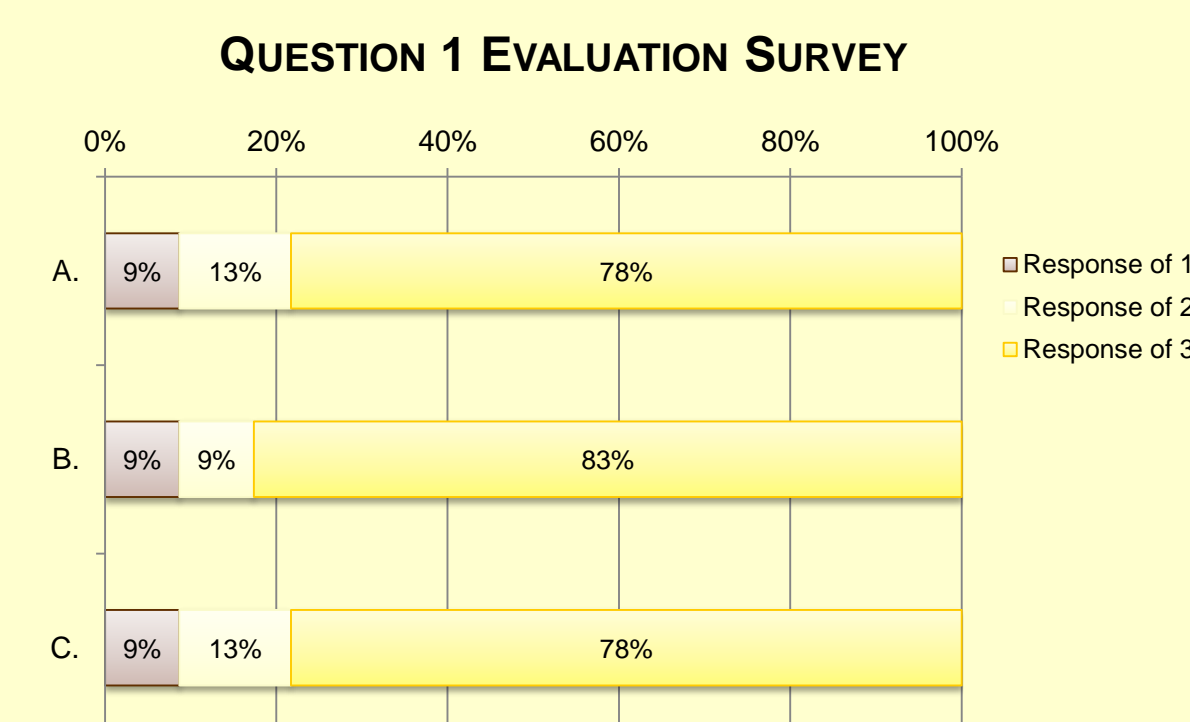
Additionally, open-ended questions and concomitant probing questions explored the participants' reactions to what was missing, what was most useful and how might they be able to use what they learned.

Results were positive. In addition, the comments offered were evaluated and where changes and adjustments to the workshops were warranted, they were implemented.

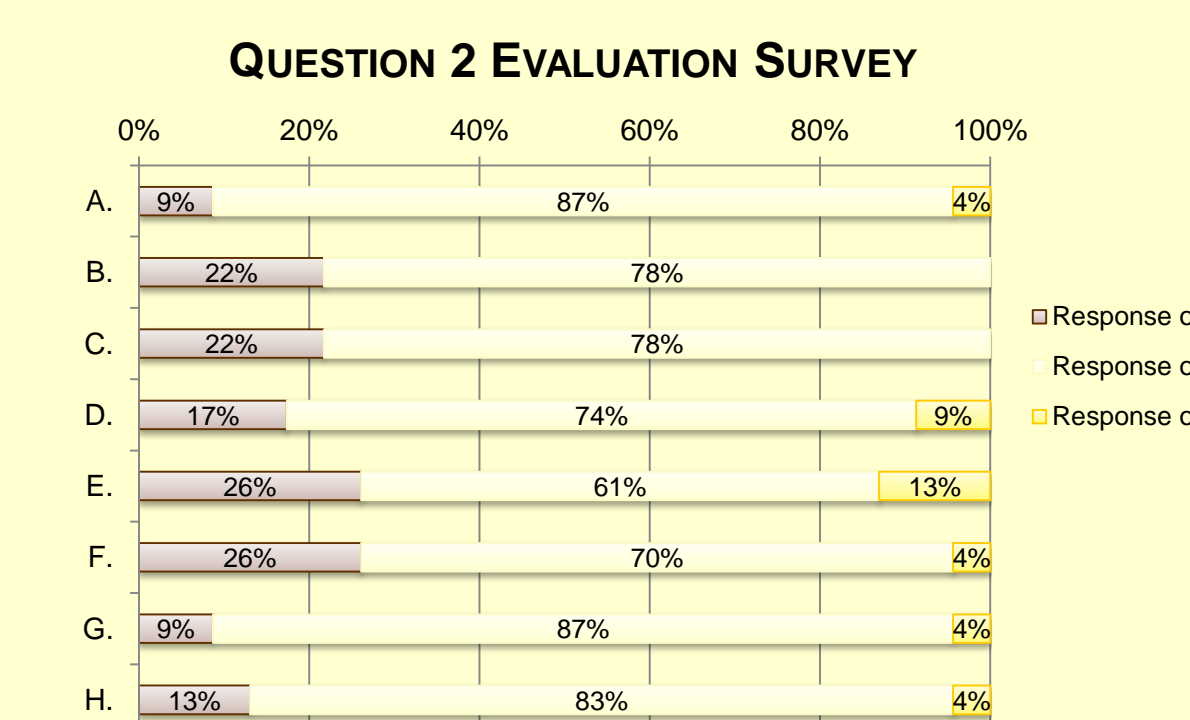
### Participants at April 19 Workshop



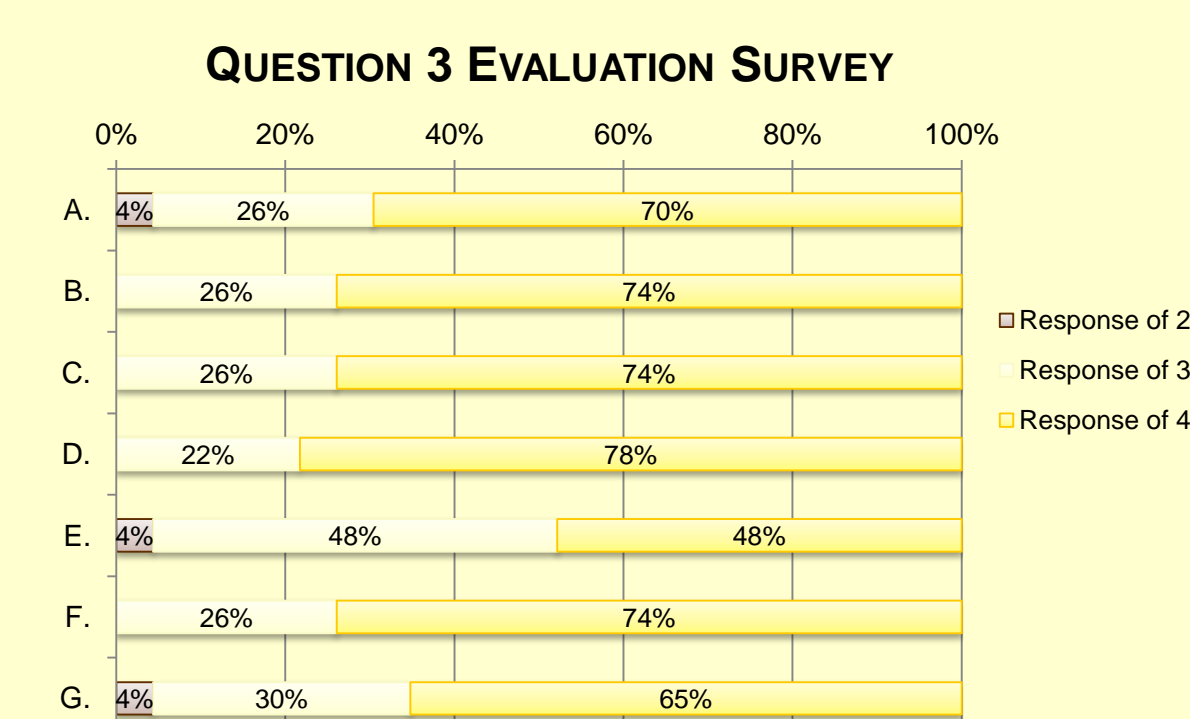
### Summary Results



Question 1: objective achieved: 1=not achieved; 2=somewhat achieved; 3=definitely achieved

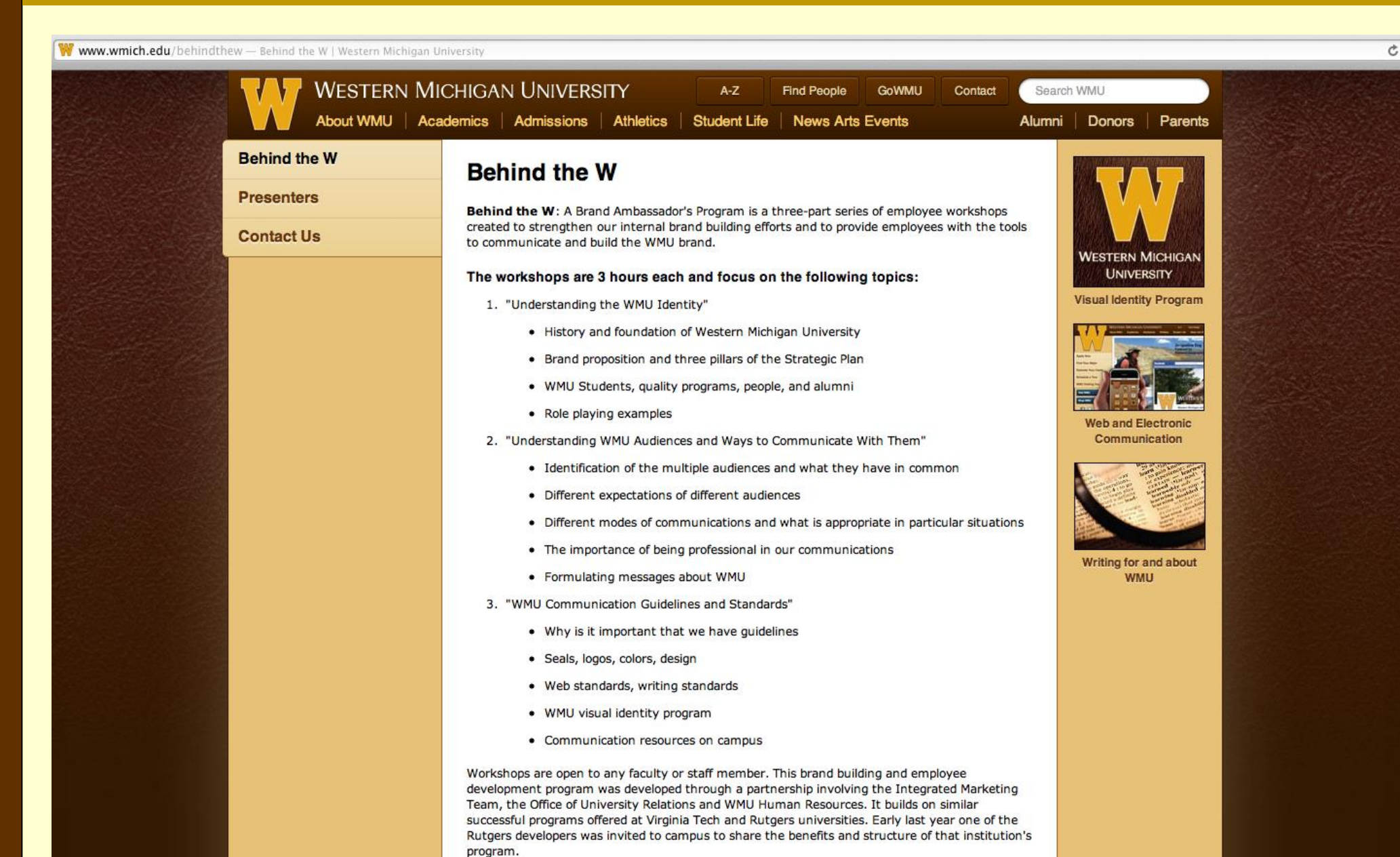


Question 2: Usefulness of Information (1=not useful; 2=somewhat useful; 3=very useful; 4=not applicable)



Question 3: Value of Workshop (1= strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=somewhat agree; 4=strongly agree)

### Workshop schedule and registration



As of the end of September 2013, the *Behind the W* Brand Ambassador program has impacted the culture at WMU:

- 38 graduates for all three workshops
- 114, 3-hour participant hours – 342 total – were logged by these 38 graduates at each of the three workshops
- An additional 140 employees have been through at least one or two of the workshops, on their way to graduating from the third workshop

Register at [wmich.edu/behindthew](http://wmich.edu/behindthew)

### Participant Comments

- “It was **engaging**”
- “Workshop was **well-conceived and well-done**. All the speakers were engaged.”
- “Good workshop that provides employees with a **sense of pride** in the place they work, which in turn **makes us better employees**. Having campus tours is great as an extension of this program.”
- “Wasn't sure what to expect, so all the **information was useful**.”
- “Reminder that **I am the W ambassador** by virtue of being a WMU community and that carries a responsibility.”
- “That this **process is starting** [was most useful] – getting everyone on the same page.”

### Contact information

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**View the schedule of workshops and register for the *Behind the W* Ambassador Program:**  
[wmich.edu/behindthew](http://wmich.edu/behindthew)

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