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TO Committee on Mission and Priorities

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RE Survey research and visibility

One of the ways colleges and universities increase their visibility is through media coverage, and one of the most reliable ways to receive media coverage is to generate periodic study results on topics of public interest. This may take the form of demographic or political surveys, watchdog studies that periodically issue report cards on issues of public concern, or annual indicators in particular fields.

Some examples:

University of Michigan
Consumer confidence survey
<http://www.sca.isr.umich.edu/>

Quinnipiac University
Political polling in the northeast
<http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x19559.xml>

Marist College
Public opinion polling
<http://www.maristpoll.marist.edu/>

Beloit College
Annual college student mindset list
<http://www.beloit.edu/~pubaff/mindset/>

Brown University
Annual "State and Federal E-Government Report"
<http://insidepolitics.org/>

Franklin & Marshall College
The Keystone Poll of Pennsylvania politics
<http://www.fandm.edu/x13076.xml>

Surveys and polls are useful for generating media coverage because they are

- based in data;
- recurring;
- relevant to public and media interests.

A recent Smith experience with survey research was telling. The Women and Financial Independence survey of college student credit card use garnered national, regional and local visibility, and continues to be cited by the media a year after its release. National coverage included a piece in the Washington Post by national syndicated financial columnist Michelle Singletary. Other media hits included USA Today, Newsday, Business Week and Inside Higher Education. A year later, such regional publications as the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and Pioneer Press (Minnesota)—areas of the country from which Smith would like to attract more applicants—continue to cite it.

Similarly, here is one example of a “watchdog” project that would speak directly to Smith’s mission: If some of our students and faculty were inclined, they could create a Web site tracking and publicizing figures on women’s election to national science and engineering bodies, such as the National Academy of Engineering, whose female membership right now stands at less than 5 percent. There are many other scientific honors organizations they could monitor. The site could be diplomatic, serious, thoughtful in tone—but could make the firm, clear point that women are drastically underrepresented and under-recognized by the major governing bodies in the sciences. The site could also spotlight those groups that made notable progress for women. The NAE awards and elections come up every year and get media coverage every year — which gives us, every year, a chance to point attention to the role that Smith is playing in reshaping the profession and shining a light on important issues of women’s advancement in engineering and the sciences.

This idea connects to many of the strategic planning directions: strengthening students’ quantitative and analytical capacities; promoting a culture of research; engaging with society’s challenges; and extending Smith’s impact on the world. The advent of Internet polling has dramatically reduced the cost of getting large samples and surveying them, making this a less expensive proposal than it would have been in the past.

We welcome collaboration that would advance this concept paper into a proposal that might point toward the establishment of a survey research center or institute.