

Nomination for Excellence in Marketing Award

The University of Alabama Online (UA Online)

“Unrivaled in Alabama” campaign to tout *U.S. News & World Report* 2023 rankings

Flight dates: Feb. 1, 2023–July 31, 2023

Targeted audience: Alabama residents who are prospective online undergraduate and graduate students

Description, Goals, Learning Outcomes and Results: outlined below

The University of Alabama Online is proud to be at the forefront of distance learning, and we’re also pleased to see our efforts reflected in our rise in industry rankings in recent years. Among our premier programs recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* for 2023 are:

- Master’s in Nursing – Veterans, #1
- Master’s in Nursing (overall), #2
- Master’s in Family Nurse Practitioner, #4
- Master’s in Business – Veterans, #5
- Bachelor’s in Business, #6
- Master’s in Education – Veterans, #6
- Online Bachelor’s – Veterans, #13
- Master’s in Business (overall), #14
- Master’s in Nursing Administration, #14
- Master’s in Education (overall), #20
- Master’s in Engineering – Veterans, #20
- Online Bachelor’s (overall), #25
- Master’s in Engineering (overall), #25

UA Online also was recognized for our achievement in serving veterans, with specific reference to our undergraduate programs and graduate-level programs in education, engineering and nursing.

With a strong tradition of ranking and winning in athletics, UA has developed a bit of a competitive spirit – especially with our in-state rivals. Perhaps the most exciting thing about this year’s rankings is that we can say that UA Online is the top-ranked online program in Alabama! We claim this for the following reasons (none of which have anything to do with football):

- We’re the only college or university in Alabama to earn a #1 and #2 ranking among our degree programs nationwide.
- Four of our programs are in the top 5 nationwide. No other school in the state has more than one ranking in the top 5.
- Spotlighting our strong military support, we earned five top 20 rankings for veterans’ programs, including #1 for the master’s in Nursing programs overall for veterans.
- Our master’s in Nursing programs overall ranked #2 out of more than 200 colleges and universities surveyed, scoring 99 out of a possible 100 points.

- Our master's in Education programs ranked #20 out of 338 schools surveyed, the bachelor's programs overall ranked #25 out of 381 surveyed, our master's in Business programs ranked #14 out of 224, and the master's in Engineering programs ranked #25 out of 119.

To promote our standing, UA Online purchased licensing rights to use the familiar *U.S. News & World Report* badges in digital marketing, including social media, online advertising, email campaigns, electronic signage and similar platforms (excluding video). The assets in this campaign provide at-a-glance recognition that UA Online continues to be a leader in delivering a superior distance learning experience across a broad spectrum of educational fields. For the three bachelor's degree-related badges, we also purchased rights to use the badges in print, which includes signage, posters, brochures, banners, plaques, direct mail, printed billboards, table tents, meeting room materials, staff communications and other print products.

Our marketing team brainstormed the creative for this campaign over several days. We wanted to highlight one of the strong traditions of the University while keeping in mind that our nontraditional students are not on campus, so they may not be as familiar with fight songs, chants and local meeting spots. It was a challenge to strike a balance between wanting this creative to evoke a pep rally with crimson and white and trophies and confetti and wanting to maintain the academic feel and integrity of the rankings without including references to athletics. We kept returning to the word "rivalry" as we talked and knew we wanted to use that somehow. We also talked about using an image of a gold trophy but ultimately decided that using the color gold throughout the design would be enough to make it clear that we are the champions. While many of our marketing pieces use white or gray backgrounds, here we chose a black background, evocative of The University of Alabama's well-recognized "Where Legends Are Made" campaign. Mixing gold, crimson and white on a black background gave us the rich championship aesthetic we wanted.

Our talented graphic designer produced many concepts for us to review, and we landed on using the UA official class ring in the design because this is an instantly recognizable tradition and one in which online students actively participate. Class rings are placed in Denny Chimes, a 115-foot-tall, 94-year-old campus bell tower, for 24 hours before the student receives the ring. According to tradition, the rings become "infused with the UA spirit" during this time. Students can request that the ring be shipped to them, or they can attend an annual ring ceremony where the University president presents the rings. The ring is associated with academic achievement and is a valued part of the UA experience for undergraduate and graduate students.

Listed below are examples of where and how we used the creative:

- Displayed on a strategically placed billboard along eastbound I-20/I-59 touting UA Online programs as "Unrivaled in Alabama" for online learning. I-20/59 is the major interstate route between Tuscaloosa and Birmingham, leading to Birmingham's

international airport. The billboard is located just east of the Mercedes-Benz U.S. International plant in Vance. The plant employs 4,500 people and was the first Mercedes-Benz plant located outside of Germany.

- Featured on digital advertisements, including Google display and social media ads for many programs and UA Online ads on LinkedIn, providing broad exposure through billions of impressions on the internet, leading to millions of page views on our UA Online website. In only six months, 50 million impressions of Google display ads garnered 586,000 clicks to our website, resulting in close to 8,000 leads (a 35% increase over the same period last year).
- Prominently featured on our UA Online homepage and many landing pages, where potential students can fill out a form to receive more information about our programs.
- Included in email campaigns targeting members of national and local organizations and associations, as well as acquired leads whom we continue to encourage to enroll.
- Displayed on vertical banners between the columns of University Hall, home to the Office of Teaching Innovation and Digital Education (OTIDE) and UA Online.
- Featured in videos running in baggage claim at Birmingham's international airport.

We hope to design more concepts in the same vein as the "Unrivaled in Alabama" campaign soon. Combining the strengths of UA Online while highlighting the strong and rich history of our beloved University resonates well with our prospective students in Alabama and beyond.