

Our View: It's time to update the book cover to match the real story

Samantha Mallot/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

The state's perception of the University of Idaho has long needed an overhaul.

When it comes time to select a university, students and parents are fretting over things such as graduation rates, academic strengths, class size, research opportunities, extracurricular activities and location. But that process is made more difficult when the perception of a school is skewed from the truth.

A recent poll of 500 Idaho residents showed they perceive Boise State University to rank higher than the University of Idaho for graduation rate, best faculty, best research program and more research opportunities. It doesn't.

Not that outward appearance should mean everything - you know the old saying "don't judge a book by its cover" - but it means a lot, especially for the UI,

The UI has been struggling with decreasing enrollment and isn't in a prime geographic location, unlike BSU, which is growing in Idaho's political, financial and population center.

In the survey, those who said they would recommend BSU to a family member or friend did so primarily because of location. That's tough to hear. The UI has much more to offer academically.

Stefany Bales, UI's executive director of communications and marketing, said, "These are people who live in an urbanish community and have a university close by, that's why they would recommend it, not because of programs."

Regardless though, it is time for a new strategy focused on portraying the UI for what it really is.

According to the Carnegie Foundation, the UI is a higher-activity research university while BSU only became recognized as a moderate-activity research institution in January. And BSU trails behind the UI by roughly 10 percent in four- and six-year graduation rates.

Both of which were perceived wrongly in the poll.

Fortunately, when asked what the UI was known for, respondents' top two answers were the law and agriculture programs - arguably two of the UI's biggest strengths.

BSU has its own perception work to do, as its top two programs were seen as business and football, and, while possibly true, at least one of them isn't a particularly useful major for most students.