

## Case Study

# Bridging the Gap Between Community and University

The University of Louisiana at Monroe turns a Lightcast Economic Impact Study into a successful awareness campaign.

**The University of Louisiana at Monroe** wanted to help community and business leaders better understand the university's role in driving prosperity for northern Louisiana, so ULM commissioned an economic impact study from Lightcast to provide expert, third-party analysis of the university's importance to the regional economy. Using data from the report, ULM ran an awareness campaign called "Your University," which featured prominent alumni alongside highlights from the impact study, and generated positive community engagement.

To read the full case study, visit: [lightcast.io/resources/blog](https://lightcast.io/resources/blog)

## ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY

by Lightcast

**What is your institution's impact on the economy?**

That's the question we answer in the **Economic Impact Study**—a custom report that measures your impact on the regional economy and workforce, and calculates your school's return on investment for students, taxpayers, and society.

Learn more at:  
[lightcast.io/solutions/education/economic-impact-study](https://lightcast.io/solutions/education/economic-impact-study)



### The Challenge

ULM wanted to communicate how much they contribute to economic health & quality of life in their region.



### The Solution

ULM commissioned an EIS to provide expert, third-party analysis of the university's role in the regional economy.



### The Results

The data became the basis for a new awareness campaign that generated positive feedback from the community.

# Bridging the Gap Between Community and University



The University of Louisiana at Monroe wanted to help community and business leaders better understand the **university's role in driving prosperity** for northern Louisiana.



ULM commissioned an **economic impact study from Lightcast** to provide expert, third-party analysis of the university's role in the regional economy.



Using information from the report, ULM ran an **awareness campaign** called "Your University," which featured prominent alumni on digital billboards alongside highlights from the impact study.



Based on the **positive community engagement** generated by the campaign, ULM plans to continue leveraging data from the impact study for future **recruitment and PR initiatives**.

## The Gap Between Community and University

Since its founding in 1931, the **University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM)** has grown to serve more than 9,000 current students in more than 40 degree programs. And while the ULM campus is a well-known fixture in northeast Louisiana, local residents haven't always seen a strong connection between the university and their everyday lives.

As an alum and former instructor at ULM, Dr. Julia Letlow knew that the university contributed extensively to the social and economic health of their region. But when she stepped into her role as executive director of external affairs and strategic communications, she needed a way to demonstrate this important contribution to the public. "We discovered that our own community doesn't always fully realize who we are and what

we do," she says.

## Asking the right questions

To bridge this gap, Letlow set out to answer questions that would help her articulate the importance of ULM to the Monroe community:

- What does ULM's presence in Monroe mean for the region's economy?
- How does ULM improve quality of life for local residents, even for those who are not part of the university?
- Why should area business owners, families, and taxpayers be concerned with the success of ULM?



Dr. Julia Letlow

But without the help of relevant data, those answers were not easy to find, let alone share. To strengthen the university's relationship with the people of northeast Louisiana, Letlow wanted to show them clear, concrete evidence that ULM improves their lives in measurable ways. "We were embarking on new territory, and we needed to have information that would resonate with our community members as to how much this university really does contribute to them and affect their lives," she says.

## Quantifying Value

Dr. Letlow turned to Lightcast's [Economic Impact Study](#) (EIS) to help her quantify and communicate ULM's story. The EIS is a custom report that measures an institution's impact on the regional economy and calculates the return on investment for three key stakeholder groups: students, taxpayers, and society.

To produce the report, Lightcast economists use a rigorous methodology that factors in every-

thing from jobs created by campus construction projects to the combination of better health, higher incomes, and lower crime that is tied to a college educated population—all of which, in turn, saves public dollars by reducing the need for taxpayer-funded social services. In ULM's case, after all the data had been compiled, Lightcast determined that the university added \$566.8 million to the northeast Louisiana economy during the 2017–2018 fiscal year—which translates to supporting 10,017 regional jobs.

Besides the overall impact, Letlow's team was especially interested in the student spending and alumni impact figures, which help demonstrate the university's value to local businesses. These numbers (\$25.7 million and \$427 million respectively) illustrate and confirm ULM's importance as a magnet that attracts learners and produces skilled workers who often live (and spend) in northeast Louisiana. ULM president Dr. Nick Bruno was then able to share this information with community leaders through his involvement with the Ouachita Business Alliance and other forums.



The Economic Value of the  
University of Louisiana at Monroe

EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY

EIS Summary Cover Page

***ULM students spend 25.7 million  
annually in your local businesses.***

 **YOUR UNIVERSITY**

**Joey Trappey**  
Alumnus, Restaurateur

**ulm.edu**

Billboard display, courtesy of ULM





***ULM alumni add \$427 million  
to our local economy.***



***YOURUNIVERSITY***

**Alberta Green**

*Alumna, Founder & CEO ABG Professional Development Solutions*

**ulm.edu**

Billboard display, courtesy of ULM

## Engaging the Community

Dr. Letlow was pleased not only with the wealth of information she found in the Lightcast report but also the creative and accessible way it was presented, which made it easy for her team to use and share. "We're just idea-oriented people," she says, "so anytime that I can take information like what Lightcast provides and put it into a story that is digestible for others, that's a win-win for all of us."

ULM's communications office capitalized on the availability of this impactful data by leveraging it in their "Your University" public awareness campaign. As part of the campaign, Letlow's team utilized newly installed electronic billboards in their parish to share highlights from the EIS alongside pictures of notable students and alumni. For example, one billboard featured ULM alum Alberta Green, founder and CEO of ABG Professional Development Solutions, alongside a message that read, "ULM alumni add \$427 million to our local economy."

Numbers like that had a "wow" factor, Letlow says. "It was incredibly effective, especially within our community, to be able to use those numbers and then pair them with real people who the community

knows and loves." And that \$566.8 million total impact number? It's been pretty well received too.

**"The ULM total annual impact is mind blowing for people," she says, "So we're constantly sharing that number."**

## Bridging the Gap

The most encouraging result of the campaign has been the way community members have engaged with the information, demonstrating the kind of personal connection to ULM's success that Letlow loves to see.

"The campaign went over really well," Letlow says, "because, of course, parents and teachers and everybody would share." After the positive response ULM has seen from their community, Letlow hopes to make greater use of the economic impact study in future aware-ness and recruitment campaigns. **"Lightcast produced so much usable data for us. I honestly couldn't be happier with what we received and would definitely encourage others to do it. It's been awesome."**