Representation on college and university websites: an approach using critical discourse analysis

Kem Saichaie
University of Iowa

Copyright 2011 Kem Saichaie

This dissertation is available at Iowa Research Online: http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/1071

Recommended Citation
http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/1071.
REPRESENTATION ON COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY WEBSITES:
AN APPROACH USING CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

by
Kem Saichaie

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in
Educational Policy and Leadership Studies (Higher Education and Student Affairs)
in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

May 2011

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Christopher C. Morphew
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to understand how colleges and universities use language to represent themselves on their institutional websites (official websites of higher education institutions). Organizations, like colleges and universities, seek to create and maintain a distinctive identity in an effort to build legitimacy (i.e., status) and attract students (i.e., tuition dollars). Institutional websites are increasingly important to the admissions and marketing practices of colleges and universities due to their ability to rapidly communicate a significant amount of content to a vast audience. Colleges and universities use language, whether textual (i.e., written) or visual (i.e., images), to position and differentiate themselves from other institutions and promote their efforts.

This study utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the language on the institutional websites of 12 colleges and universities across a number of characteristics (e.g., control, type, geographic region, admissions selectivity) in the United States. Theoretically, CDA provides the means to examine everyday language in an effort to raise awareness about issues of inequality, such as access to education. Methodologically, Fairclough’s approach to CDA has three dimensions of analysis. The first dimension is descriptive analysis where the intent is to describe the properties of the textual and visual elements. The second dimension involves interpretive analysis where the goal is to examine the contents of language and its functional parts to understand and interpret the connections between the role of language and the greater social structures it reflects and supports. Societal analysis, the third dimension, focuses on explanations of larger cultural, historical, and social discourses surrounding interpretations of the data.

The analyses from this study suggest that colleges and universities utilize a common promotional discourse en masse to market rather systematic representations of “higher education” despite the fact that they vary widely by a number of institutional characteristics. Specifically, analyses reveal that institutions use language to repeatedly establish prestige and relevancy by touting the accomplishments of their institutional
actors. The institutions attempt to engage the viewer with relational language, present numerous co-curricular experiences along with numerous images related to generic institutional characteristics (e.g., architecture, campus scenery), and multiple layers of navigation. The scholarly commitment associated with higher education plays a reduced role while the intangibles available to the prospective student are at the forefront of representations in the sample.

Institutions also poorly represent other social goods (e.g., class, sexual orientation). Of the 453 images in the study, 98 feature a non-white actor (21%) and 146 feature a female actor (32%). Representations of diverse actors often appear in the form of caricatures (e.g., Native American in tribal dress). Given the mission and rhetoric stemming from many postsecondary institutions, including the institutions in this sample, to increase access to education for underrepresented individuals and enhance diversity in all its forms, the language utilized on the websites does not align with such statements.

By deploying similar promotional discourse, the institutions choose what to present, emphasize, and exclude. Hence, institutions retain a great amount of control over information the viewer has access to on the institutional website. The language in use reveals that the institutions retain significant control over its actors with strategic placement of obligational discourse and, in most cases, complete silence on issues. Such discourse constructs an unrealistic portrayal of higher education while simultaneously reducing the role higher education has as a social institution committed to teaching, research, and service.

Abstract Approved: ________________________________________

Thesis Supervisor

Title and Department

Date
REPRESENTATION ON COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY WEBSITES:
AN APPROACH USING CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

by
Kem Saichaie

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in
Educational Policy and Leadership Studies (Higher Education and Student Affairs)
in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

May 2011

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Christopher Morphew
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Kem Saichaie

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies (Higher Education and Student Affairs) at the May 2011 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

Christopher C. Morphew, Thesis Supervisor

Carolyn Colvin

Scott F. McNabb

Michael Sauder

David B. Bills
To Barbara Jean Kane (1921-2010), whose advocacy, bravery, faith, and independence remain forever impressed upon me
Suffer, die, or get better; but whatever you do, live while you’re alive.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation and degree represent the assistance of a great many individuals. First, I want to extend a sincere thanks to Dr. Christopher Morphew for providing insightful feedback, challenging questions, and astute advice during the crafting of this study. I appreciate the opportunity to work in close collaboration with a dynamic scholar in the field who recognizes the importance of exploratory research and the value of not taking oneself too seriously. Second, a deep thanks to Dr. Carolyn Colvin who introduced me to Critical Discourse Analysis and ardently supported my trials and tribulations with the theory and method. Our conversations over the last three years not only helped me gain a grasp of how to position my study, but how to position myself as an educator, researcher, and advocate for underrepresented individuals. Next, a wholehearted thanks goes to Dr. Scott McNabb aka “my third base coach.” Scott’s willingness to share his experiences in and about Thailand provided me with a sense of “home” even from Iowa City. I would be remiss if I did not mention our conversations about baseball, noodles, and “the big picture,” which provided a welcome respite during the development of this project. I would also like to offer my appreciation to Dr. David Bills and Dr. Michael Sauder. Each made helpful comments and contributions to my project amidst very busy schedules.

I wish to thank the numerous educators, scholars, co-authors, and offices I had the privilege of collaborating with during my time at The University of Iowa. First and foremost, I want to recognize Dr. Ernest Pascarella and Dr. Michael Paulsen. Each is a true role model for all students in terms of scholarship, teaching, and humility. I want to thank Dr. Paul Umbach and Dr. Christine Ogren for their input and advice during the early years of my doctoral studies. I want to thank James Maxey for a student-centered approach to teaching statistics. Thank you to my co-authors for allowing me the opportunity to collaborate with you: Kathleen Goodman,
Chad Loes, Ryan Padgett, and Megan Johnson. I also would like to thank Allison BrckaLorenz, Jamie Jorgensen (and Team Skin), and Frederick Staten who provided helpful information and friendship. Thank you to John Achrazoglou and the Education Technology Center, Jean Florman and the Center for Teaching, Stephen Silva and Instructional Services, and The Office of Admissions for the opportunity to serve your office’s initiatives at the University of Iowa.

Last, I want to extend a genuine thank you to my friends and family whose support never wavered. Thank you to Amy Seidelman, Christopher “Kit” Strief, Troy Hyde, Christy Steffen, Shaylyn Dean, Kealey McIntire, Joseph Kennedy, Stephen “Sto” Christian, Dane Shiltz, my OU Crew, Gordon Kling, Diane DeFranco-Kling, Ralph and Beverly Akermark, Steve Van Oort, Jamie Marchiori, and Christopher Moeller. A special mention goes to Stephen Winzenburg, whose early lessons on professionalism remain instrumental today. I am profoundly indebted to Ashley Oehlerking who provided peerless encouragement and enthusiasm during my doctoral experience. Ashley exudes joy, laughter, and is endlessly optimistic; I endeavor to return the same to her. Thank you to my roommate, tennis partner, cross-country-road-trip-co-pilot, hiking companion, brother, and best friend: Len Saichaie. Finally, thank you to my parents, Mary and Pichai Saichaie. My mother taught me the importance of responsibility and the beauty of creativity. Her aspirations as a writer helped me to discover my own. My father taught me invaluable lessons about selflessness, hard work, thinking critically, and to respect everyone equally. What he overcame to support my family is endlessly inspiring and the reason he is my hero.

Post Script: To all bicycle riders, on or off campus: please wear a helmet.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................... x

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... xi

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................1

Statement of Problem .................................................................................................1
Background ................................................................................................................5
  Importance of Language .........................................................................................5
  Importance of Images ............................................................................................7
Purpose of the Study ..................................................................................................8
Research Question .....................................................................................................9
Research Sub-Questions ...........................................................................................10
Significance of the Study .........................................................................................10
Limitations ...............................................................................................................13
Organization of the Study .......................................................................................14

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ..................................................................................16

Introduction ..............................................................................................................16
College-Choice Process ............................................................................................17
Admissions and Recruitment Marketing Practices in Higher Education .................19
Traditional Means of Marketing ..............................................................................23
  Viewbooks ...........................................................................................................23
  Mission Statements ..............................................................................................27
Role of Technology in Higher Education Marketing ...............................................32
Institutional Websites ...............................................................................................35
  Importance of Institutional Websites ................................................................35
  Origins of Websites in Higher Education ............................................................36
  Websites and The College-Choice Process .........................................................37
Critical Discourse Analysis ......................................................................................42
  Critiques of CDA ................................................................................................44
  CDA as a Conceptual Framework .......................................................................45
  CDA Studies Examining Viewbooks and Websites ............................................48
Conclusion ................................................................................................................51

3. METHODOLOGY ...................................................................................................53

Introduction ..............................................................................................................53
  Research Question ...............................................................................................53
  Research Sub-Questions ........................................................................................53
Research Design .......................................................................................................54
Data Collection .........................................................................................................54
Protection of Human Subjects ..................................................................................55
Sample ......................................................................................................................55
  Group One ...........................................................................................................56
  Group Two ..........................................................................................................58
  Group Three .......................................................................................................59
  Group Four .........................................................................................................59
Sample Rationale .....................................................................................................61
Method .................................................................................................................. 64
Textual Analysis..................................................................................................... 64
Visual Analysis ...................................................................................................... 64
Research Process .................................................................................................. 65
Criteria for Scientific Rigor ................................................................................ 65
Role of the Researcher ......................................................................................... 66
Researcher’s Journal ............................................................................................. 69

4. TEXTUAL FINDINGS ............................................................................................ 71

Review of the Sample ............................................................................................ 72
Home Page ............................................................................................................. 73
  Descriptive Analysis ............................................................................................ 73
Home Page Preliminary Analysis and Summary ................................................. 75
About ....................................................................................................................... 76
  Descriptive Analysis ............................................................................................ 76
  About Page Preliminary Analysis and Summary ............................................... 79
Admissions ............................................................................................................ 79
  Descriptive Analysis ............................................................................................ 79
  Admissions Preliminary Analysis and Summary ............................................... 82
Academic Majors and Programs .......................................................................... 83
  Descriptive Analysis ............................................................................................ 83
  Academic Majors and Programs Preliminary Analysis and Summary .............. 86
Financial Aid ........................................................................................................ 87
  Descriptive Analysis ............................................................................................ 87
  Financial Aid Preliminary Analysis and Summary ............................................. 89
Student Life ........................................................................................................... 90
  Descriptive Analysis ............................................................................................ 90
  Student Life Preliminary Analysis and Summary ............................................... 93
Summary of Chapter 4 .......................................................................................... 94

5. VISUAL FINDINGS ............................................................................................ 96

Review of the Sample ............................................................................................ 98
Home Page ............................................................................................................. 98
  General Descriptions .......................................................................................... 98
  Types of Actors .................................................................................................... 100
  Page Design ......................................................................................................... 101
  Preliminary Analysis and Summary .................................................................. 107
About ...................................................................................................................... 108
  General Descriptions .......................................................................................... 108
  Types of Actors .................................................................................................... 109
  Page Design ......................................................................................................... 111
  Preliminary Analysis and Summary .................................................................. 112
Admissions ............................................................................................................ 112
  General Descriptions .......................................................................................... 112
  Types of Actors .................................................................................................... 115
  Page Design ......................................................................................................... 116
  Preliminary Analysis and Summary .................................................................. 119
Academic Majors and Programs ........................................................................ 119
  General Descriptions .......................................................................................... 119
  Types of Actors .................................................................................................... 119
  Page Design ......................................................................................................... 120
  Preliminary Analysis and Summary .................................................................. 121
## 6. PROCESS AND SOCIETAL ANALYSIS

- **Review of Fairclough’s Framework**
  - Contents of the Language
  - Subjects
  - Relations
  - Connections
- **Process Analysis**
  - Contents of the Language
  - Verbs
  - Modality
  - Purpose
  - Subjects
  - Types of Actors
  - Relationships
  - Image Act
  - Angle
  - Distance
  - Placement and Sequence
  - Size
  - Textual Representations of Relationships
  - Connections
  - Societal Analysis
  - Institutional Identity
  - Prospective Student Identity

## 7. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

- **Research Question**
- **Research Sub-Questions**
- **Response to Research Questions**
  - Home Page
  - About
  - Admissions
  - Academic Majors and Programs
  - Financial Aid
  - Student Life
  - Social Goods
  - Summary
  - Promotional Discourse
  - Similarity
LIST OF TABLES

Table
1: Sample Institutions and 2010 Carnegie Classification Descriptions .......................57
2: Sample Institutions and Key Characteristics .................................................................60
3: Visual Categories/Themes Identified Among the Sample ...........................................97
4: Types of Actors on Home Pages ..................................................................................101
5: Types of Actors on About Pages ..............................................................................110
6: About Page Design Consistencies ...........................................................................112
7: Types of Actors on Admissions Pages ........................................................................115
8: Types of Actors on the AMP Pages ..........................................................................120
9: Themes for Academic Majors and Programs Pages .................................................120
10: Types of Actors on Financial Aid Pages ....................................................................124
11: Types of Actors on Student Life Pages .....................................................................128
12: Fairclough’s Interpretive Analysis Framework ...........................................................133
13: Total Number of Images and Types of Actors ........................................................171
A1: Janks Linguistic Analysis Rubric ..............................................................................189
B1: Kress and van Leeuwen Visual Analysis Rubric ......................................................191
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1: Hossler and Gallagher Model (1987) ................................................................. 18
2: The University of Texas-Austin logo ................................................................. 22
3: Fairclough’s Dimensions of Discourse and Discourse Analysis ....................... 47
4: Primary Image Stanford University Home Page ................................................ 99
5: Princeton University Home Page ...................................................................... 100
6: Native American representation on the Eastern Washington University Home Page ..................................................................................................................................................... 102
7: Native American representation on the Humboldt State University Home Page .... 104
8: Native American representation on the Southern Oregon University Home Page .... 104
9: Indiana University Home Page .......................................................................... 105
10: Three-Column Vertical Triptych (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) ...................... 105
11: Three-Column Horizontal Triptych (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) ................. 105
12: Harvard University Home Page ...................................................................... 106
13: Indiana University – Bloomington About Page ............................................... 108
14: Stanford University About Page ........................................................................ 109
15: University of Iowa About Page Image ............................................................. 110
16: Harvard University About Page Image ............................................................. 110
17: Eastern Washington University About Page Image ........................................ 111
18: University of Illinois Admissions Page ............................................................. 113
19: Eastern Washington University Admissions Page Image ............................... 114
20: Indiana University Admissions Page Image ...................................................... 117
21: Rhodes College Admissions Page Image .......................................................... 118
22: Harvard University AMP Primary Image .......................................................... 121
23: Rhodes College Financial Aid Page .................................................................. 122
24: Southern Oregon University Financial Aid Page Banner Images ................ 123
25: Fiske Seal on the UI Financial Aid Page .......................................................... 123
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities use text and image to position and differentiate themselves from other institutions, promote their efforts, and attract the attention of distinct audiences including prospective students, donors, and alumni (Urciuoli, 2003). Language, whether textual (i.e., written) or visual (i.e., images), is perpetually and purposefully at work. Part of the work language does is to represent particular attitudes, entities, individuals, ideals, and institutions. Representation depends on how language is deployed and operationalized, and by whom. A principal channel for communicating distinct institutional characteristics is on the Internet by using institutional websites (official websites of higher education institutions). Discourse, or the combination of modes of language-in-use (i.e., text, image), on college and university websites forms powerful messages that represent more than meets the eye. Investigating the utilization of language is important to understanding how colleges and universities represent themselves on institutional websites. Despite the primacy of institutional websites in college and university admissions and recruiting endeavors, limited research exists examining the type of discourse on institutional websites. This study analyzes the texts and visuals in an effort to understand how colleges and universities use language and what types of messages institutions communicate on their institutional websites.

Statement of Problem

Institutional websites are increasingly important to the admissions and recruitment practices of colleges and universities. Colleges and universities embrace the use of institutional websites due to their ability to rapidly communicate a significant amount of information to a potentially vast audience (Abrahamson, 2000; Adelman, 2006; Anctil, 2008; Ashburn, 2007; Boyles, 2007; Hartman, 1998; Hossler, 1999; Kittle & Ciba, 1997; McKnight & Paugh, 1999; Poock & Lefond, 2001; Raisman; 2003; Stevens, 2007; Tierney, 2004; Venegas, 2006). The combination of language (e.g.,
words, phrases, statements) and images (e.g., photographs, graphics, multimedia) are components colleges and universities intentionally deploy to represent the institution (e.g., Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Hossler, 1999; McKnight & Paugh, 1999; Mechitov, Moshkovich, Underwood, & Taylor, 2001; Pooch & Lefond, 2001; Urciuoli, 2003, 2009). It is through a blend of discourses that colleges and universities seek to market their institutions in order to create a distinct identity and leave a distinct impression upon a number of target audiences, including prospective students (Anctil, 2008; Askehave, 2007; Hossler, 1999; McKnight & Paugh, 1999; Pooch & Lefond, 2001; Schneider, 2006). Anctil (2008) aptly stated, “Image is not everything for colleges and universities, but it is close. The image people have of an institution influences so many of the decisions they will make and the actions they will take as a result of that image” (p. 33).

Organizations such as colleges and universities deal with a high level of isomorphism, a constraint on one entity in a population to operate like other entities that experience similar environmental conditions (Hawley, 1968). Thus, like other organizations, colleges and universities compete for customers (i.e., students) and resources (i.e., tuition dollars). However, competition goes beyond customers and resources. Organizations vie for institutional legitimacy and political power, which translates into economic and social fitness (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Consequently, to maintain fitness, colleges and universities must rely on a variety of tactics in order to create a distinctive image, one they attempt to communicate to a number of audiences.

Since higher education is largely an intangible product, the challenge for admissions and recruitment offices is to cultivate their image as they seek to emphasize any tangible evidence necessary to elevate their reputation (Anctil, 2008; Bok, 2003; Conard & Conard, 2000; Kotler & Fox 1995; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Powell & DiMaggio, 1983). In order to enhance identity and reputation, admissions and recruitment offices use language as a means to accomplish this end, with institutional websites serving as a primary outlet to represent these efforts. With mounting evidence about the
importance of institutional websites as a vehicle to market institutions, the research suggests that 60% to 70% of college and university website access comes from external visitors, with prospective students among the primary visitors (McCollum, 1999; Middleton, McConnell, & Davidson, 1999; Pooch & Lefond, 2001; Schneider & Bruton, 2004).

Eighty-four percent of prospective students report using institutional websites to do research and find information on colleges and universities, indicating that websites play a prominent role in the college-choice process (e.g., Anctil, 2008; Hossler, 1999; Pooch & Lefond, 2001). College and university websites often serve as the first, if not only, impression of the institution for prospective students; in fact, Anderson and Reid (1999) stated, “Visiting university websites seems to have become a norm–with many people considering their visit to a university website as their first visit to the university itself” (p. 54). In essence, the “handshake” that greets many prospective students during in-person, campus visits has been supplanted by the “digital handshake” that greets them when they take an online, virtual campus tour via the institution’s website (Anctil, 2008; Carnevale, 2005; Ramasubramanian, Gyure, & Mursi, 2002). As institutional websites further entrench themselves as primary sources for information about a college and/or university, the response of higher education institutions has not gone unnoticed.

Increasing amounts of resources are dedicated to website design and maintenance, with conservative estimates ranging from “$100,000 and $2 million to create and between $50,000 and $1 million annually to maintain” (Schneider & Bruton, 2004, p. 77). Design elements are of particular concern as they focus on the types of language chosen to best represent the institution (Hossler, 1999; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Pooch & Lefond, 2001; Ramasubramanian et al., 2002; Schneider, 2006). The amount of scrutiny that goes into this design and maintenance process involves multiple individuals and offices across a campus, often extending to external advertising and consulting firms that focus solely on applying commercial marketing strategies and tactics to institutions
of higher education (Bok, 2003; Fairclough, 1993; Kotler & Fox, 1995; McKnight & Paugh, 1999; Paulsen, 1990). Given the importance of institutional websites to admission and recruitment practices at colleges and universities, a dearth of scholarship exists.

Hossler (1999) stated that admissions and marketing administrators at colleges and universities need to actively evaluate institutional websites to ensure they supply the type of information students need rather than fuel demands for content and services students may not use, or even ask for. In light of this statement, and in the face of increased competition for scarce resources (e.g., tuition dollars), college and universities have turned to advertising and marketing techniques found in commercial practices in order to construct messages for delivery via a number of outlets including institutional websites (Anctil, 2008; Bok, 2003; McKnight & Paugh, 1999; Slaughter & Rhoads, 2004; Stevens, 2007). When applied to higher education, the term is defined as “academic marketing” (Litten, 1980, p. 42). Messages in this form often carry content that highlights periphery elements (e.g., number of student organizations, success of athletic teams, size of climbing wall) that have little relevance to the educational process (e.g., Anctil, 2008; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Hossler, 1999). The preponderance of research about college and university websites remains relegated to advertising and higher education consulting firms, with nascent attention to the role that websites play in the college-choice process (Hossler, 1999; Pooch & Lefond, 2001; Strauss, 1998). In addition, much of the academic research on the ways colleges and universities represent themselves in their admissions and recruitment materials lacks a sound theoretical foundation (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). In essence, conclusions about admissions and recruitment practices stemming from empirical research remain extremely limited. Given the importance of institutional websites to both prospective students and the colleges and universities, it is appropriate and timely to investigate how colleges and universities represent themselves through the use of language on institutional websites.
Background

Discourse is the product of the interplay of language found in textual or visual representations (Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b, 1995a, 2001; Gee, 2005, 2008; Kress, 1989). Representations are the patchwork of words, ideas, images, elements, events, meanings, objects, and symbols that contribute to the ever-evolving nature of discourse. Representations combine to form discourse models, which are fluid, situated in context, and under constant revision (Gee, 2005). The following sections elaborate on the importance of language and image as a means to construct discourse models portrayed through representations on college and university institutional websites.

Importance of Language

The use of language is an important component of communication in marketing materials distributed by admissions and recruitment offices from colleges and universities. Not only is language an intrinsic part of communication, it goes beyond a simple information transmission. A fundamental task of the work language does is to represent (Wetherell, 2001). Representation depends on how language is deployed and operationalized, and by whom. Gee (2005) argued that language works to represent in two interconnected ways: as support for the performance of social activities and social identities; and to support human affiliation with cultures, social groups, and institutions. Cultural, economical, historical, political, and social contexts shape the nature of language, leaving it subject to social behaviors and conditions. Because language is socially constructed, the construction of meaning is never neutral; rather, it is defined relative to the individual’s social and cultural experiences and subject to relations of power (e.g., Gee, 2005; Fairclough, 1992a; Hall, 1997; Kress, 1989). Social and cultural experiences are an amalgam of patterns of discourse models that guide the norms by which people act, believe, interact, talk, think, and value (Gee, 2005). For example, the social construct of the prospective student is entirely changed through the industrialization of college admissions by colleges and universities (McDonough, 1994).
No longer are high school students merely “high school students,” rather they are “college applicants” (McDonough, 1994, p. 443). Constructed as applicants, these students are now potential “customers” of an institution whereby institutions are motivated to recruit desirable students because of the potential rewards (e.g., financial) that follow. McDonough (1994) argued that the sociocultural experience of searching for colleges went from one of independent exploration of options to a highly normative process filled with enrollment management techniques and academic marketing discourse. In other words, the process became commoditized. An individual’s ability to access information about college-going then becomes relative to the individual’s sociocultural position, with language serving the important commodity. Kress (1989) crystallized the notion of the relationship between an individual and her sociocultural position relative to language: “The individual language user is not therefore in my view impassive and impotent in the face of a monolithic language system, but is rather constantly engaged in its reconstitution and change” (p. 3). In essence, linguistic and social processes are tightly bound together. An individual’s ability to ascertain/process/use language is dependent on her member resources, which are subject to the sociocultural position she holds. McDonough’s (1994) study on the social construction of college applicants provides insight into the importance of member resources:

Although college admissions environments influence some applicant behavior, the low-SES students and schools of this study (and probably most low-SES students and schools) do not participate in the described college choice behaviors and instead are influenced more by their limited financial resources and by local university admissions’ opportunities. Both of the high-SES schools of this study, however, are shaped by a national, volatile, competitive college admissions environment that is exacerbated by a local, community culture focused on prestige. (p. 443)

Fairclough (2001) posited that language is the most common form of social behavior and it is situated in social context; in essence, language shows the “social effects of texts and on texts” (Fairclough, 1995b, p. 155). Language that works to represent is
constitutive (socially shaped, yet also socially shaping) and constructive (used to shape), built from society while also working to build and shape the world, people, and the relationship between the two (Fairclough, 1995b). The notion of Silverstein’s strategically deployed shifter (SDS) also comes to light. Silverstein (1976) used this term to describe an expression or lexical item that “shifts” depending on the context of its use and by whom is using and receiving the message. Urciuoli (2003) provided this example: “People using term X in a referring expression in field A are engaged in a different pragmatic activity from those using the formally identical term X in a referring expression in field B” (p. 396). Colleges and universities use language to market their institutions in order to develop identities and construct relationships in an effort to promote and build their prestige (Urciuoli, 2009), though limited research exists examining the type of language used on institutional websites.

Importance of Images

Language is not merely spoken or written. It encompasses multiple modes of communication, in particular images (Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b, 2001; Hall, 1997; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress, 2000; 2004; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The use of images is a core component of communication in academic marketing materials distributed by admissions and recruitment offices from colleges and universities (Anctil, 2008; Askehave, 2007; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; McKnight & Paugh, 1999; Pooch & Lefond, 2001; Ramasubramanian et al., 2002). In an increasingly visual culture, images are employed to communicate myriad of actions, ideas, information, emotions, expressions, events, rules, regulations, and symbols (Fairclough, 2001; Kress, 2000; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In some cases, images capture what words cannot express (Fairclough, 2001). Hall (1997) explained that images represent both denotation of an event and a connotation that carries an array of meanings in any given context. Similar to text, visuals are subject to social conditions, and thus can influence the way an individual responds to messages (Kress & Hodge, 1988; Hall, 1997; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Kress and
van Leeuwen (2006) posited, “Like linguistic structures, visual structures point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction” (p. 2).

Fairclough (1992a, 1992b, 1995b, 2001) noted the significance of visual language (e.g., videos, photographs, multimedia) as mutually operative in conjunction with written and spoken materials, that is, the combination of the image and the language that forms the discourse and meaning of a message (Hall, 1997). When analyzing language, researchers should include a focus on the content as well as the context of the “text” in an effort to interpret meaning in the public sphere (Flick, 2009; Hall, 1997; Mitra & Cohen, 1999), thus inductively uncovering the discourse of larger sociocultural issues. “Discourses are intimately situated in social contexts: they both reflect context and constitute them” (Trowler, 2001, p. 186).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how colleges and universities use language to represent themselves on their institutional websites. Organizations like colleges and universities, seek to create and maintain a distinctive identity in an effort to build economic strength and enhance social standing (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). A primary outlet for communicating institutional identity is on the Internet through institutional websites. Evidence of the importance of institutional websites to college and university admission and recruiting practices is mounting (e.g., Adelman, 2006; Anctil, 2008; Carlson, 2010; Poock & Lefond, 2001; Taylor & Morphew, 2010; Venegas, 2006). As institutions’ internal investments escalate, evidence indicates that prospective students also increasingly, and intentionally, incorporate institutional websites into their information-gathering inquiries. Therefore, it is important to examine the complex interactions of language that imbues discourse models. Such an investigation will contribute to further understanding the conflated factors that contribute to academic marketing practices, the college-choice process and the social structure that binds the process. Fairclough (1992a, 1995a, 2001) argued that through the close, careful study of
language, it is possible to not only describe and interpret representations, but also to explain the formation of relationships, structures, and processes that affect individuals who are embedded in language.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) goes beyond traditional discourse analysis by not only seeking to describe language in use, but also to analyze, interpret, and explain the significance of the relationship of representations embedded in discourse (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2005; Kress, 2000; Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Molsey, Hui, & O’Garro-Joseph, 2005). The “critical” component to Fairclough’s (2001) theoretical approach is concerned not only with overt or seemingly obvious representations in language, but also with obscured or opaque messages veiled or embedded when given only a cursory overview. Methodologically, Fairclough (1993, 1995a, 2001) provides an analytic framework researchers using CDA can employ to illuminate representations within the text. Fairclough’s framework (see Chapter 2) provides the researcher with a systematic set of inquiries to analyze both textual and visual constructs in relation to social phenomena. Richardson (2007) posited that CDA goes beyond a simple content analysis and strives to unearth the complex and varied processes of meaning-making manifested in and within texts. In essence, CDA allows for recursive movements between linguistic and social properties with a discursive set of inquires that examine of textual and visual representations and the ability to examine micro-level representations in text that contribute to macro-level explanations of what the representations mean at a societal level (Rogers, 2004). Flick (2009) stated that websites make fine examples to study to “show the social construction of reality” (p. 278). The language that forms the messages is of equal importance as individuals seek remedies for social inequities, such as access to higher education (e.g., Gladieux & Swail, 1999b; Tierney, 2004; Venegas, 2006).

**Research Question**

This study focuses on types of discourses active on college and university websites and revolves around the following overarching question:
In what ways do colleges and universities use language (textual and visual) to represent themselves on institutional websites?

Since little is known about the nature of discourse at work on college and university websites, the preceding question will serve as a principal guide to ascertain local, institutional, and societal levels. As institutional websites further entrench themselves into the arsenal of admissions and recruiting materials, one might expect to find discourse similar to other promotional items produced by colleges and universities, such as viewbooks. However, the extent to what type of discourse appears on college and university websites remains largely unexplored (Saichaie, 2010). Fairclough’s approach to CDA allows the researcher to discursively analyze language in use on college and university websites. Therefore, the following questions provide a more specific focus related to CDA.

**Research Sub-Questions**

1. What similarities/dissimilarities exist in the language used to represent institutions within similar institutional types?
2. What similarities/dissimilarities exist in the language used to represent the institutions of dissimilar institutional types?
3. How are social goods (e.g., class, gender, race, sexual orientation) represented in the language used on institutional websites between and within classifications?

**Significance of the Study**

As institutional websites become the most readily utilized means to access information about education, it is important to examine language used to represent the institutions (Fairclough, 1993; Lenhart, Simon, & Graziano, 2001; Schneider, 2006; Taylor & Morpew, 2010; Urciuoli, 2009). How institutions represent themselves online through the use of language has significance for many stakeholders, including prospective students (Adelman, 2006; Anctil, 2008; Carnevale, 2005; Gladieux & Swail,
1999a; Hossler, 1999; LeFauve, 2001; Middleton et al., 1999; Poock & Lefond, 2001; Raisman, 2003; Saichaie, 2010; Schneider, & Bruton, 2004; Urriuoli, 2009). College admissions and recruitment academic marketing practices overflow with promotional discourse designed to accentuate the qualities of the institution (Urriuoli, 2009). The current study exists at the intersection of research on higher education and critical studies. Scholars from the disciplines of higher education (e.g., Gladieux & Swail, 1999a; Hossler, 1999; Perna, 2004; Tierney, 2004; Venegas 2006) and critical studies (e.g., Askehave, 2007; Chiper, 2006; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Mautner 2005a, 2005b; Mitra & Cohen, 1999) acknowledge the increasing prominence of the Internet in relation to higher education, noting its role in relation to access and choice issues (Hossler, 1999; McDonough, 2003). Yet, research investigating the discourse, whether textual or visual, remains scarce at best (Askehave, 2007; Ramasubramanian et al., 2002; Saichaie, 2010; Urriuoli, 2009).

While colleges and universities widely vary (e.g., type, control, amount of subsidies for students, and preparation for persistence and degree attainment), research has demonstrated that attending institutions of higher education vastly enhances an individual’s ability to achieve increased personal and professional mobility and make positive contributions to society as opposed to those who make alternative status-attainment plans such as entry into the workforce or military service (e.g., Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1997; Nora, 2004; Paulsen, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perna 2006a; St. John, Paulsen, & Starkey, 1996; Winston, 2004). Consequently, those individuals seeking access to higher education, in all of its varieties, must navigate a multitude of messages, both informational and promotional, in order to determine a college of choice (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Capraro, Patrick, & Wilson, 2004; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Hossler, et al., 1999; Hossler & Foley, 1995; McDonough, 1994, 1997; Venegas, 2006). The ever-increasing significance of
institutional websites adds another layer of content that may inhibit and accelerate an individual’s search for information about college-going.

This study is not about college choice, rather an important component that contributes to it. That said, existing research on the college-choice process is prolific and informs largely what is empirically known about the phenomena. Much of the research on college choice focuses on factors related to socioeconomic status (e.g., parental income, educational background), race, and so on (e.g., McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2004; Perna & Titus, 2005; Walpole, 2003); access to counselors (e.g., McDonough, 1997; McDonough & Calderone, 2006); institutional characteristics (selectivity, size, etc.; Hossler et al., 1999); athletics (e.g., Judson, James, & Aurand, 2005; Toma & Cross, 1998); and availability of financial aid (access to scholarships, information about funding; Kim, 2004; Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2006; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Perna, 2006b; St. John et al., 1996). Virtually no existing research examines the role of admissions and recruitment elements, such as institutional websites, in the college-choice process (Perna, 2004; Strauss, 1998). Even more limited is research investigating the type of discourse found on college and university websites (Saichaie, 2010).

 Representation on college and university websites is increasingly important to analyze as the technological barriers that previously excluded certain segments of the population from accessing the Internet appear to be receding. The “digital divide” that separates the “technology haves and have-nots” also is decreasing. Venegas (2006) reported that low-income students have progressively more adequate access to computers. However, lack of information, support, and training necessary for finding resources (e.g., financial) online persist. While reducing the digital divide is a positive piece of information, the larger picture remains dim because there is limited access to technologies, the Internet, and, ultimately, information; language remains as a barrier for students (Tierney, 2004). To date, no such study examining the language and image on
institutional websites of colleges and universities in the United States has incorporated the use of CDA (Saichaie, 2010).

Furthermore, the preponderance of college-choice literature has reflected a quantitative approach (McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006a). However, Perna (2006a) noted that as research extends into other areas related to college access and choice, including racial, ethnic (e.g., Perna, 2007), marketing (e.g., Anctil, 2008), and policy-based (e.g., Zimbroff, 2005) research, gaps in the literature will be addressed. Research methods, specifically qualitative methodology, assist in addressing research gaps. Qualitative methods, such as CDA, are likely to complement the existing quantitative approaches and provide fuller understanding of the matter.

**Limitations**

Due to the nature of qualitative research, generalizability is not a primary goal. However, since the unit of analysis is websites from a variety of institutions from a variety of classifications and locations, this study may provide valuable insights to a larger audience. Another limitation is that only a few institutions were selected to represent an array of higher education institutions in the United States. Previous research has suggested working with a sample that is small when conducting a close, careful study of language (Askehave, 2007; Pitts, 2004). Therefore, many types of institutions are not represented in this sample (e.g., community colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, military academies, for-profit institutions). However, as scholarship evolves, future research may focus on these types of institutions in order to ascertain the types of language at work on these institutional websites.

The nature of qualitative research often positions the role of the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2001). Since language is socially constructed and never static, the researcher is not immune to the process and product of these constructions. Therefore, the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are limited to that of the researcher. Yet, the utility of
discourse analyses, including CDA, is the researcher’s ability to make interpretations and explanations through reflexive and rigorous methods of inquiry (e.g., Fairclough, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Halliday, 1985; Rogers et al., 2005).

Critiques of CDA (see section in Chapter 3 for more detail) and visual analysis have suggested that since both are relatively recent in development, much of the research utilizing methods of inquiry on language remains exploratory and lacks “genuine analytical procedures” (Flick, 2009, p. 246). Nevertheless, research examining language is crucial to the refinement of such analytical procedures (e.g., Fairclough 2001; Gee, 2005; van Dijk, 1993). This study may help develop CDA as well. For further detail, please see Chapter 3, the Role of the Researcher and Researcher’s Journal, for information regarding biases and subjectivities that shape the member resources of the researcher.

Organization of the Study

This section provides a preview to the organization of the following chapters of the current research. In Chapter 1, the statement of the problem, background, purpose of the study, and research questions intended for investigation, significance, and limitations were presented.

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature relevant to the current study. It includes six parts: Part I discusses the college-choice conceptual model. Part II surveys the paucity of literature and research on admissions and recruitment practices in higher education. This section provides context and shows the development of admissions and recruitment practices by colleges and universities. Part III contains a review of the literature on the role of technology in the admissions and recruitment practices of colleges and universities. Part IV focuses on a review of literature on how colleges and universities represent themselves through traditional marketing means, namely viewbooks and mission statements. Part V includes an examination of the limited research on college and
university websites. Part VI provides a review of the literature on CDA, its development as a method and theory, and its application to this study.

Chapter 3 contains a description of the methodology, sample, data analysis tools, and role of the researcher. Chapter 4 discusses the textual findings of the study while Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the visual findings. Chapter 6 discusses the application of the conceptual framework offered by CDA to interpret and explain the data. Chapter 7 contains a summary and a response to the research questions guiding the study. Lastly, Chapter 7 closes with implications for practice and indications for future research.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The principal inquiry of the current study was to examine how colleges and universities use language and image to represent themselves on institutional websites. This chapter reviews literature that informed the current study and has six distinct parts. Part I opens with the traditional model of the college choice process. This conceptual model has been noted in numerous types of research on higher education including research about the marketing practices by admissions and recruitment offices at colleges and universities. Part II provides an overview of the emerging literature on admissions and recruitment marketing practices in higher education. Literature on the admissions and recruitment practices of colleges and universities has cited the trend that some institutions market themselves more like commercial industries than like social institutions committed to the tenets traditionally associated with higher education: teaching, research, and service (Bok, 2003; Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001). The dearth of literature on college and university admissions and recruiting practices focuses on more traditional means of representation such as viewbooks and mission statements. Part III of the chapter then focuses on a review of literature on how colleges and universities represent themselves through traditional marketing means. Increasingly, technology plays a role in the admission and recruitment practices of higher education institutions. Part IV discusses the significance of the development of technology for prospective students and higher education institutions. The omnipresence of college and university websites in admissions and recruiting practices warrants a closer examination. Part IV provides context about the role of technology in the admissions and recruitment practices. Part V includes a review of the limited research on college and university websites. A narrow line of scholarship exists about the role of websites in college and universities’ admissions and recruiting marketing. Even more limited is analysis of the textual and
visual content that institutions use to represent themselves. Of the existing research, very few studies are empirical and/or guided by a theoretical framework (Hartley & Morphew, 2008). CDA is both a theory and a method that allows for the examination of textual and visual elements, yet provides a framework that allows the researcher to go beyond simple descriptive analysis, offering researchers a lens to interpret and explain Discourse in context with larger social structures (Fairclough, 1992a, 1995, 2001). Part VI provides background information about the origins of CDA, its development as a method and theory, and its application to this study. Included in Part VI is the theoretical framework that guided the current study. Lastly, this section includes a review of three studies that utilized CDA theoretically and methodologically to examine language and image in higher education viewbooks and websites.

College-Choice Process

The majority of college-choice literature revolves around the conceptual framework of Hossler and Gallagher’s three-stage process (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Perna, 2006a). Hossler and Gallagher (1987) presented a college-choice model that delineated the search process as three phases: predisposition, search, and choice. Normally occurring around 7th grade and extending to 9th grade, the predisposition stage can be described as the conscious decision to attend college or seek alternatives (e.g., entering the workforce).

The search stage suggests that individuals seek information about colleges and universities they may attend. This stage builds upon the factors contained in the predisposition stage in addition to educational and occupational aspirations and prospective higher education institutions (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1999; Nora & Cabrera, 1992; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). Typically, this stage begins when students enter 10th grade and may last until 12th grade (Hossler et al., 1999).

The choice stage occurs between 11th and 12th grades when students apply to and choose a specific postsecondary institution (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al.,
1999; Nora & Cabrera, 1992; Terenzini et al., 2001). This stage has received a significant amount of attention in the research, including a significant portion of empirical research, related to college choice (Perna, 2006a; Terenzini et al. 2001). Hossler and his colleagues (1999) noted that information processing and information gathering are two distinct acts: Information gathering simply means to seek information while information processing means to use information to critically assess the issues required in making a decision. Accentuating the choice stage are a number of factors including “college direct marketing and recruitment activities” (Hossler et al., 1999, p. 96). In each stage, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) posited that students use information to inform their decision-making processes.

![Diagram of the Hossler and Gallagher Model (1987)](source)

**Figure 1: Hossler and Gallagher Model (1987)**


Though a myriad of factors affect college choice (e.g., access to information) existing empirical research suggests SES is a key component to understanding differences in college choice. Traditionally, educational and occupational aspirations are examined in accordance with students’ SES (e.g., Hossler et al., 1999; Perna, 2006). Those with increased levels of SES (e.g., family background characteristics like parental income) are more likely to have higher academic achievement and aspirations (Avery & Hoxby, 2004; Perna, 2006a). Researchers note the role factors related to SES affect decision-making (e.g., Hossler, et al, 1999; McDonough, 1997; Nora, 2004; O’Connor, Hammack, & Scott, 2008; Perna 2006a;). For high-SES students, the college-choice
process is highly rationalized and involves professional assistance and preparation (e.g.,
private counselors) in an effort to gain acceptance at the “right” college (McDonough,
1994, 1997). For example, McDonough (1994, 1997) found that factors tied to SES
influence college-choice behaviors. Conversely, low-SES students are less likely to have
access to resources (e.g., computers) and networks (e.g., peers, counselors).
Subsequently, low-SES students are more likely to be affected by the realities of limited
access to resources, such as information about college-going and financial aid
(O’Connor, et al, 2008; Perna, 2004; Venegas, 2006). As colleges and universities market
themselves to prospective students, they are keenly aware of the resources prospective
students have access to (e.g., McDonough, 1994; Perna, 2004; 2007; Walpole, 2003).
However, existing research attending to this concept remains scarce (McDonough, 1997;
Perna, 2004).

A revision of Hossler and Gallagher’s work by Nora and Cabrera (1992) paid
negligible attention to the possibility of including the Internet and institutional websites
as a factor in the college-choice process. An explanation for the exclusion is that most
colleges and universities in the United States did not have developed websites until the
late 1990s (Kittle & Ciba, 1999). By examining language and image on websites, this
research adds to the understanding of actions by prospective students in the stages of this
model (Perna, 2004; Venegas, 2006).

Admissions and Recruitment Marketing
Practices in Higher Education

Increasingly, researchers have noted the “marketization of higher education”
institutions (e.g., Bok, 2003; Fairclough, 1993, 1995; Mautner, 2005a; Paul 2005),
thereby adopting the practices of other commercial enterprises (Anctil, 2008; Askehave,
2007; Boyles, 2007; Fairclough, 1993, 1995; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Kotler & Fox,
1985; Paulsen, 1990). Part of the movement to adopt a market-based approach to
admission and recruitment practices stems from the late 1970s to early 1980s when
prospective students began to assert themselves as consumers of specific academic programs, and institutions sought ways to present themselves as more appealing (Paulsen, 1990). In the face of dwindling student numbers during this time period, competition for students sparked the “trend” of recruitment practices by admissions offices at colleges and universities (Paulsen, 1990). Today, that “trend,” which first surfaced four decades ago, has seamlessly transitioned into an accepted standard practice for college and university admissions and recruitment efforts (Bok, 2003; Paulsen, 1990; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

“The new market realities of the twenty-first-century education marketplace require responsive business practice” (Anctil, 2008, p. 27). In order to compete in the marketplace, colleges and universities use a variety of techniques found in business practices such as advertising, marketing, and mass media to represent themselves (e.g., branding, focus groups, enrollment management, target marketing, and consulting firms) and are now commonplace in college admissions and recruitment practices (Anctil, 2008; Anderson & Reid, 1999; Boyles, 2007; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Hossler & Foley, 1995; Kittle, 2000; Kittle & Ciba, 1997; Kotler & Fox, 1995; Litten & Brodigan, 1982; McDonough, 1997; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Paulsen, 1990; Poock & Lefond, 2001; Schneider, 2006; Urciuoli, 2003; Venegas, 2006; Wright, 1991). When applied to higher education, the term is defined as “academic marketing” (Litten, 1980, p. 42). Over the last 15 years, entire departments on the campuses of most colleges and universities have surfaced (Anctil, 2008); in some cases, specific units (e.g., business college, law college) have dedicated marketing personnel (Blumenstyk, 2006). Askehave (2007) succinctly captured the sentiment related to marketization of higher education: “Whether one praises or fears the marketization of universities, its role as a strategic tool in higher education affairs is on the increase – and present – at various levels of university practice” (p. 724).

Traditionally, and to varying degrees of success, a vast number of individuals, departments, offices, and units function to serve the mission of the institution as a whole
(Birnbaum, 1988). In a comprehensive review of literature related to the marketing of higher education, Anctil (2008) asked, “Should colleges and universities be driven by mission or the market?” (p. 1). The administrators’ task to market the institution is at loggerheads with the faculties’ charge to provide curriculum deemed worthy of higher education (Birnbaum, 1988). Despite the rhetorical underpinnings of this debate, the simple fact is that if an institution does not market itself, the faculty will not have students to teach, nor facilities or resources to conduct research, and would be unable to provide service to the community, thus making it difficult to fulfill the institution’s mission. Therefore, colleges and universities work diligently to market their institutions to external target audiences to establish an image, often at the cost of internal improvements to sufficiently carry out its mission: “Institutional image outweighs academic quality and helps build prestige and perceptions of quality” (Anctil, 2008, p. 34). As mentioned in Chapter 1, this is particularly important in higher education because the product is hard to objectively measure and many institutions contain homogametic features (Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Powell & DiMaggio, 1983; Taylor & Morphew, 2010).

In crafting an image, the concept of “branding,” and its meaning, in the higher education arena surfaces. Farquhar (1989) defined a brand as “name symbol, design, or mark that enhances the value of a product beyond its functional value” (p. 24). Anctil (2008) posited, “Branding is really image construction, image management, or image makeover” (p. 35). Colleges and universities employ specific textual and visual elements to cultivate their brands in order to derive a favorable identity. A memorable slogan and logo can serve an institution for years and leave powerful impressions about the institution while generating awareness, legitimacy, and relevancy (Bauerly & Tripp, 1997; Kotler & Fox, 1995; Martin, 1989; Pulley, 2003). Language and image then combine to form an institutional image that institutions market as their “brand.” Anctil
(2008) stated that the brand often overshadows academic quality, allowing the institution to develop prestige, thus enhancing perceptions of quality and distinctiveness.

For example, the University of Texas’ (UT) slogan, “What Starts Here Changes the World,” is a textual representation designed to establish the “world-class” nature of UT while enhancing the brand image and identity of the institution. For a visual example, one needs look no further than the logo associated with UT, the Texas Longhorn.

![Texas Longhorn Logo]

**Figure 2: The University of Texas–Austin logo**

Source: Retrieved from [http://www.utexas.edu/visualguidelines/vg_longhorn.html](http://www.utexas.edu/visualguidelines/vg_longhorn.html)

1/29/11

Colleges and universities then attempt to differentiate to target markets. Kotler and Fox (1985) stated that a central “task of the institution is to determine the needs and wants of target markets, and to satisfy them….“ (p. 10). In marketing to target audiences, college and universities turn toward practices that deal with the art of persuasion, which often accentuates minor differences that do not appear on the surface. Common areas of focus are perceived academic quality (i.e., rankings), perceived amenities and social life (i.e., feeling comfortable and contemporary), and successful and visible athletic programs (Hartley & Morpew, 2008; Toma & Cross, 1998). For example, sports simplify the collective image of the institution, a successful athletic team equates to a successful institution (Hartley & Morpew, 2008; Toma & Cross, 1998). These components are constructed textually and visually and are powerful means of representation active on
many college and university websites (Anctil, 2008; Askehave, 2007; Poock & Lefond, 2001; Ramasubramanian et al., 2002).

As colleges and universities continue to adopt approaches that more closely resemble those of private sector, commercial businesses, they conflate the mission and identity of the institution as one primarily associated with social concerns to one driven by profit-focused, private matters (e.g., Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001; Gumport, 2000; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The following section reviews the literature on the traditional marketing vehicles of colleges and universities: viewbooks and mission statements.

**Traditional Means of Marketing**

In an electronic era, traditional means of representation via viewbooks and mission statements are still central components of admission and recruitment marketing approaches of colleges and universities (Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Morphew & Hartley, 2006). The following section presents relevant research about how colleges and universities represent themselves using viewbooks and missions statements.

**Viewbooks**

Viewbooks, or brochure and magazine-style publications produced by colleges and universities that contain textual and visual elements showcasing the institution, remain a primary vehicle for postsecondary institutions’ admissions and recruitment marketing approaches to prospective students, even in an era of electronic media (Hartley & Morphew, 2008). Viewbooks are relevant because they capture a moment in the institution’s history that websites cannot because of their ever-changing nature (Hartley & Morphew, 2008). Although viewbooks have a rich history in higher education, especially with regard to admissions and recruiting marketing practices via this medium, research examining their content remains limited (Durgin, 1998; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Hite & Yearwood, 2001; Hollith & Foley, 1995; Klassen, 2001). The majority of research conducted on viewbooks employs content analysis as the method of inquiry and
is not guided by theory, yet it represents the scarce scholarship on marketing materials produced by colleges and universities to represent themselves. Despite this fact, the research conducted on college and university viewbooks provides content for the current study because they describe the majority of the scholarship on the way institutions represent themselves using language and image. The following section reviews the literature on viewbooks.

Durgin (1998) took textual elements from six institutions’ viewbooks and asked 100 prospective students for their perceptions of the messages the schools attempted to communicate. Durgin found that students were unable to identify institutions based solely on the textual descriptions because the schools employed very similar textual representations. Research by Hite and Yearwood (2001) and Klassen (2001) focused on analysis of visual elements in viewbooks. Hite and Yearwood examined photographs in 91 viewbooks from institutions with a variety of characteristics (i.e., type, control, religious affiliation) across all viewbooks and found that images of athletics (66%), faculty/student interaction (65%), and student life (96%) were featured prominently in their samples. Although an assortment of images appears in viewbooks, Hite and Yearwood surmised that it is difficult to make distinctions between institutions based on the images schools use to represent themselves regardless of institutional characteristics.

Klassen’s (2001) detailed visual analysis of a small sample (n = 32) of viewbooks revealed that institutions ranked near the top or bottom of the *U.S. News and World Report* (USN) “Best Colleges” represented themselves quite differently. Klassen found that institutions ranked near the top used images of students engaged in the following categories: artistic activities, the city in or next to which the university is located, cultural activities and events, the faculty and faculty profiles, science labs, students attending class, students involved in internships, students studying inside, teachers working one-on-one or in small groups with students, and technology other than a computer. Conversely, lower ranked schools used images featuring alumni profiles; commencement ceremonies;
outdoor scenery; students exercising in fitness centers; students in intramural sports; students involved in outdoor recreation; student spectators at varsity sports, fairs, carnivals, and parades; student profiles; students involved with university media (radio, TV, and newspaper); students working with small children; students studying outside; and students at leisure in the student union. Klassen concluded that “top” institutions use the faculty to represent the “face” of the institutions while lower ranked schools use students as the “face” in order to represent them. Klassen also concluded that the “promise” of higher education at the top institution, as represented in the viewbooks through high student/faculty interaction, artistic and cultural activities, events, and opportunities, appears to occur during the student’s tenure at the school, whereas the lower ranked institutions display the “promise” as something that comes after commencement and beyond (read: employment).

Hartley and Morphew’s (2008) study is the only empirically based, theoretically guided work on viewbooks of colleges and universities in the United States that existed at the time of the current research. Hartley and Morphew used the conceptual framework of Labaree (1997), who tied higher education institutions to three clear goals: democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility. Democratic equality and social efficiency align with postsecondary institutions’ charge of preparing students to become civically and economically productive individuals in their communities, in essence, contributing to the “public good.” Conversely, the notion of social mobility aligns closer to the “private good” associated with higher education, meaning that those with a postsecondary degree will use the credential for greater personal gains financially and socially. Hartley and Morphew posited that colleges and universities design messages in their viewbooks to reflect the latter of the three goals that Labaree assigned to higher education.

Examining both textual and visual elements contained in the viewbooks from institutions of various types (i.e., research, doctoral, master’s, baccalaureate) and control (public or private), six thematic areas emerged from Hartley and Morphew’s (2008)
research: academics and faculty, admissions and financial aid, co-curricular opportunities, institutional context/campus features, and purpose of higher education/value of an education. Hartley and Morphew found that the textual and visual content in the viewbooks made college seem like “idyllic havens” (p. 677). Furthermore, Hartley and Morphew stated that viewbooks represent a romanticized notion of college life:

They are filled with happy and healthy students (in only a few instances were the presence of a health or counseling center mentioned). Undergraduates are a racially diverse and a generally attractive group—all are in their late teens or early twenties. There are no disabled, obese, or depressed students. Everyone belongs. There are unparalleled opportunities for students to participate in a range of stimulating (if not outright “fun”) activities inside the classroom (with smiling, attentive faculty members at hand) not to mention a myriad of co-curricular options. Classes tend to be small. The faculty are a mixture of Marie Curie, Mr. Chips, and Mr. Rogers, notable for their international scholarly reputations, commitment to teaching and nurturing attentiveness to each “special” student in the academic neighborhood. Happily, all colleges and universities have a range of financial aid options—especially scholarships—that render postsecondary education “affordable” (so much so that many viewbooks don’t feel the need to trouble the reader with petty details such as how much tuition is). (p. 677)

With regard to Labaree’s (1997) framework, Hartley and Morphew (2008) found very few textual or visual constructions contained in the viewbooks that represented the democratic equality of higher education. More apparent were representations alluding to the ideal of social efficiency in the form of student readiness for employment following their college experience. Hartley and Morphew’s research revealed the prevailing message contained in viewbooks: higher education will lead to higher individual returns. In essence, viewbooks showcase, textually, visually, or in combination, a very commoditized and privatized image of the institution that leads primarily to social mobility for the individual. Hartley and Morphew concluded, “It is the rare viewbook that goes beyond the sales pitch to try to connect with something more cerebral, spiritual, or educational” (p. 688). Hartley and Morphew’s research indicated that institutions may conceptually strive to differentiate themselves from other schools through textual and visual representations, yet struggle to do so in reality.
In sum, the limited research on viewbooks suggests that colleges and universities use very similar textual and visual constructions to represent themselves regardless of control, size, and type. Plainly said, “viewbooks market a lifestyle” (Anctil, 2008, p. 79), one that is highly normative and fairly general; “evident in viewbooks is the prevalence of institutional isomorphism” (Hartley & Morphew, 2008, p. 683). This was not always the case. Fairclough (1993, 1995a, 2001) posited that during the 1960’s college and university marketing materials, such as viewbooks, presented information in a very direct manner. The increased competition for students seemingly benefitted prospective students as the institutions identified the need to embrace more student-centered discourse in order to attract students. If viewbooks serve as an important historical artifact, then the messages that emanate from the publications at this point in time suggest a shift in higher education as an industry that exists primarily to serve the private good associated with individual gains from a social institution committed to public endeavors traditionally associated with higher education (Bok, 2003; Fairclough, 1993, Mautner, 2005b). In addition, the language and image used in viewbooks rarely deviates from a proscriptive representation of “college,” which is ironic considering a goal of marketing practice is to create a distinctive identity. As Hartley and Morphew (2008) noted in their study on viewbooks, colleges and universities are on record for representing much more than just a “generic” experience; they purport to do so in their mission statements – the subject of the next section.

Mission Statements

Mission statements are another means of representation used by colleges and universities to communicate their purposes and reasons for existence. Once merely a part of organizational and management literature, mission statements are now a part of the conversation and scholarship in higher education (Birnbaum, 2000). Mission statements are an important artifact that represents an institution’s purpose at a given point in time, created to either be instructional or to generate a shared sense of purpose (Morphew &
Hartley, 2006). According to Morphew and Hartley (2006), mission statements of an instructional nature give organizational members a way to align their work with the institution’s aspirations and objectives; while mission statements designed to create a shared sense of purpose are to encourage members to promote institutional characteristics to others. Conversely, the literature also provides examples of those who think mission statements are decidedly flowery, general, generic, grandiose, or supercilious (e.g. Davies, 1986; Newsom & Hayes, 1991). In this sense, mission statements supply little focus for the institution’s members, lack specificity, and, if anything “the language in mission statements is intended to evoke an all-purpose purpose” for the institution (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p. 3). Formulating a mission statement in this manner serves a normative function. It legitimizes the institution and shows that it understands the “rules of the game” (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p. 3). Of the limited research that exists on mission statements of postsecondary institutions, two recent studies investigating mission statements are of particular relevance to the current study: Morphew and Hartley (2006) and Taylor and Morphew (2010). Both studies employed linguist analysis techniques in their methodology in order to examine the textual construction of the college and university mission statements. A review of the studies’ findings follows.

Morphew and Hartley (2006) sampled mission statements from 299 colleges and universities across Carnegie Classification. They found institutional control to be a more important factor in predicting the elements in a mission statement than Carnegie Classification; a small number of textual elements emerged across institutional type and control and use of the term “service” varied, frequently predicated on institutional type. Of the 118 distinct elements in their analysis, Morphew and Hartley found that several elements occurred frequently. For example, the notion of a “commitment to diversity” was found in 67% of public institutions’ statements. The authors’ analysis yielded significant findings related to the usage of “service.” Five of the six classifications emphasized service as serving the local community while further analysis revealed much
more. Public institutions used service with allusions to civic-oriented outcomes such as voting, remaining in-state, and, namely, paying taxes. This usage also tended to underscore ways that the institution would serve the local community by its contributions to the local, regional, and state economy (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Private institutions’ mission statements had a slightly different trajectory, equating service with more global and social connotations. For example, an excerpt from a private institution’s statement said that service “…enable[s] men and women of diverse backgrounds to engage and transform the world” (p. 11). Morphew and Hartley asserted that this type of representational usage is intentional because institutions are keenly aware of the realities associated with their control type and need to show their significance to their constituents. Public colleges and universities are beholden to the taxpayers and state legislatures while private colleges and universities are obligated to their benefactors. The takeaway is that colleges and universities represent themselves through mission statements in ways that are normative and political (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Seldom do mission statements include the language of aspiration, which Morphew and Hartley attributed to institutions’ inability or unwillingness to communicate messages that do not speak to the expectations of their primary constitutions. In essence, institutions are saying, “we understand what you want and we’re going to deliver it to you” (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p. 14).

Building on the work of Morphew and Hartley (2006), Taylor and Morphew’s (2010) study specifically examined the mission statements from a random sample of 100 baccalaureate institutions. Taylor and Morphew’s (2010) sample mission statements ranged from the five classes of baccalaureate classification from the Carnegie Foundation1. The mission statements stemmed from the U.S. News and World Report

---

1 Baccalaureate classes (Carnegie Foundation, 2008): Arts and sciences focus, no graduate coexistence (A&S); Arts and sciences, plus professions, no graduate coexistence (A&S+); Balanced arts and sciences/professions, no graduate coexistence (Balanced); Professions plus arts and science, no graduate coexistence (Prof+); Professions focus, no graduate coexistence (Prof).
(USN) and the institution itself. Taylor and Morphew used this approach because they wanted to investigate how baccalaureate institutions represent themselves to prospective students, the primary readers of USN, through mission statements in USN (U.S. News and World Report mission statements or USMS) and how the institutions represented themselves with the official mission statement (OMS) on their institutional website. Taylor and Morphew used two frameworks to guide their study.

The first was Breneman’s (1994) conception of a liberal arts institution based on the traditional model of a liberal arts college, and the second was Urciuoli’s (2003) use of the Strategically Deployed Shifter (SDS) developed from Silverstein (1976), mentioned above. Breneman (1994) defined a liberal arts college as an institution that exhibited a residential student population, had an enrollment of 2500 students or less of traditional college-going age, and had a curriculum consisting of liberal arts courses (defined as degrees conferred in 40%, or more, liberal arts areas of study). This perspective is important to understand because true liberal arts colleges are disappearing from the higher education landscape, yet many institutions still promote this classification, if not ideal, to prospective students.

“Urciuoli’s SDS illustrates how specific terms may transmit both positive, descriptive images and legitimacy when placed within a rhetorical index of other terms and images” (Taylor & Morphew, 2010, p. 7). Examples of terms Urciuoli defined as an SDS include diversity, excellence, leadership, and skills (Urciuoli, 2003). For example, the use of the term “excellence” is an optimal SDS because it does not have a direct referent, which makes it difficult to define, contest, and quantify (Taylor & Morphew, 2010; Urciuoli, 2003). The utilization of Urciuoli’s SDS is important because it provides researchers with an analytical tool for textual representations and specifically applies to representations made in the context of higher education (Taylor & Morphew, 2010).

The mission statements submitted to the USN differed from the official mission statements of the institution, suggesting that the creation was for specific audiences,
purposes, or a combination of the two. In fact, only six in their samples proved to be identical. Taylor and Morphew (2010) found that several colleges attempted to associate a liberal arts education with career-oriented outcomes. This finding is similar to the Hartley and Morphew’s (2006) study on viewbooks in which representations (textual and visual) in numerous publications linked the outcomes of higher education to individual and private benefits. Taylor and Morphew posited that USMS are intended to be “recruitment vehicles” represented by “ornamentation” while OMS were descriptive in nature (p. 30).

With respect to Breneman’s (1994) framework, no institution linked its mission, in either the USMS or OMS, to students from the traditional college-going age. Representations mentioning the residential aspect of a baccalaureate institution were also infrequent. For example, Taylor and Morphew (2010) found that schools (e.g., Beloit College, DePauw University, and Knox College) with substantial residence facilities and programs eschewed this aspect of their institution. With regard to the liberal arts definition supplied by Breneman, Taylor and Morphew found the mention of small enrollments as the most frequent occurrence in the sample. Given the amount of time and resources that go into the creation of a mission statement, Taylor and Morphew’s research suggests that this is not a simple omission, but rather a conscientious effort to remain normative.

With respect to Urciuoli’s framework, Taylor and Morphew’s (2010) findings suggest that USMS were designed to communicate numerous messages to readers, namely prospective students. For example, the use of the term “excellence” was associated with curriculum while the term “diversity” represented something other than race (i.e., geography, intellect, religious). No school in Taylor and Morphew’s study associated “diversity” with race. Such representation is an example of the colleges strategically employing a term and drawing from its referent cache, without defining what it actually means. The intention of this type of construction, Taylor and Morphew
argued, is to demonstrate both normative expectations yet allow the reader latitude to provide specific definitions on an individual basis. With such representation, the institution establishes that it “knows” the “rules of the game,” thus conferring legitimacy. This concurrent signal does not confine the reader, likely a prospective student, to rigid definition. Colleges and universities represent themselves in very general terms with their mission statements, making it difficult to differentiate mission statements of institutions regardless of control, size, and type. Taylor and Morphew’s (2010) research uncovered another layer to understand why colleges and universities operate the way they do.

The previous section reviewed pertinent research on the traditional means that colleges and universities use to represent themselves. In support of the scholarship on viewbooks, and in concert with the research on mission statements, Taylor and Morphew (2010) aptly stated, “colleges and universities are determined to camouflage their distinctiveness via the use of ambiguous, ubiquitous terms” (p. 501). Analyses of both textual and visual forms of representation return conclusions that speak to the homogeneity among college and university marketing materials. By marketing certain “sameness,” colleges and universities legitimize their institutions and spend considerable resources creating gradations of messages that contain normative concepts. CDA provides a research tool that allows for the examination of such a phenomenon in an effort to describe, interpret, and explain why social institutions like colleges and universities endeavor to represent themselves so similarly. Integral to this shift is the evolution and role of technology in admissions and recruitment practices at colleges and universities. The rapid development of technology in admissions and recruitment practices allows higher education institutions to market to new target audiences in new ways (Hanna, 1998).

**Role of Technology in Higher Education Marketing**

In the late 1960s, the role of technology began to expand in college and university admissions and recruiting practices as a primary means to market to target audiences
Colleges and universities used a variety of electronic devices and mediums (e.g., filmstrips, computer video discs, CD-ROMs) to provide students with textual and visual representations of their respective institutions (McDonough, 1994). Even as the technology advanced, the institution remained the primary source of formal information for the prospective student (Hartman, 1997; Strauss 1998). Meticulous crafting of the messages was still a central component of the admissions and marketing material, as is the case today (Hartman, 1997; Litten & Brodigan, 1982). Yet, as the technology evolved, it shared a common thread: the institution controlled the content (Hartman, 1997). However, the emergence of the Internet as a dominant communication outlet opened a new manner, medium, and mode of communication for colleges and universities, as well as for prospective students. The prevalence of the Internet and websites has had two primary consequences for college and university admissions and recruitment practices.

First, prospective students can quickly search for formal information on the institution’s website while also rapidly accessing other informal sources of information about the institution, such as student newspaper, third-party publisher’s rankings (Carlson, 2010; Frazier, 2003; Hartman, 1997; LeFauve, 2001; Poock & Lefond, 2001). With the evolution of technology, with websites in particular, students can access information and operate in “real time” rather than “mail time” (Frazier, 2003; Venegas, 2006). Second, carefully designed messages that once allowed institutions to communicate information in an asynchronous or “one-way” manner, and to act as the sole distributor of information, now face the additional challenge to control/manage the messages from sources outside of the institution’s purview. In order to meet these challenges, colleges and universities have increasingly turned toward techniques found in advertising and marketing in an increasing consumer-oriented market for higher education (Bok, 2003; Boyer, 1987; Fairclough, 1993; Hartman, 1997; Paulsen, 1990; Wright, 1991). Wright (1991) stated that advertising, marketing, and media are now part
of the information-equation prospective students and parents must navigate as they filter through admissions and recruitment messages. These influences are seen as positive and negative. Portrayed as positive, they present a wider variety of “information” about colleges; seen as negative, the media stories seem to contain “hype, distortion, exaggeration, and plain misinformation” (Wright, 1991 p. 12). McDonough (1994) argued that advertising, marketing, and mass media-style manipulations of information (read: textual and visual elements) that suggest college values are increasingly problematic because they leave students and parents vulnerable. A primary concern of CDA is to examine the effects of those who are marginalized by those in power through the use of language and image.

In an era of increasing digital competition, the ease of access to information and the speed at which it can be accessed have changed the game for many colleges and universities. Institutions soon realized what many prospective students, their parents, and other institutions were beginning to discover: postsecondary institutions offer very comparable core components (i.e., classes, housing, activities), and for many differentiating among and between individual institutions, this can be difficult. Anctil (2008) stated, “Higher education is full of similar institutions, all desperate to stand out in a positive and meaningful way” (p. 17). Due to the amount of competition for scarce resources (e.g., tuition dollars), colleges and universities accentuate the peripheral and tangential differences, most of which do not relate to the process of learning. Adding to the competition for limited resources are for-profit institutions. Anctil reported that admissions and recruitment offices at for-profit institutions compensate not with a better educational “product,” but rather to generate a “greater awareness of the product” (p. 23). This is done with a heavy implementation of advertising and marketing techniques that attempt to saturate students with textual and visual representations of their institution through a variety of media channels, including websites of popular search engines (e.g., Google).
Textual and visual representations help colleges and universities to cultivate a unique image, position, or niche, one they strive to maintain and market. Due to elevating competition for scarce resources, colleges and universities increasingly rely on language and image delivered via digital and electronic means to represent the institution to target audiences and markets, not least of which include prospective students. Hanna (1998) stated, “This combination of demand, costs, application of content and new technologies is opening the door to emerging competitors and new organizations that will compete directly with traditional universities and with each other for students and learners” (p. 66).

Institutional Websites

Part V contains three subsections reviewing the literature on the use of institutional websites. The first section discusses the importance of institutional websites to admission and recruitment practices. The second section provides information about the origin of institutional websites. The final section reviews the literature related to websites’ role in the college-choice process.

Importance of Institutional Websites

In an increasingly digital world, websites are essential to the marketing practices of admissions and recruitment offices at colleges and universities (e.g., Anctil, 2008; Boyles, 2007; Hossler, 1999; Kittle & Ciba, 1999; Poock & Lefond, 2001; Schneider & Bruton, 2004; Raisman, 2003; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Specifically, marketing practices are central to the commercial enterprise and encompass a range of activities including the textual and visual distribution of content via the Internet on institutional websites (e.g., Anctil, 2008; Boyles, 2007; Hossler, 1999; Kittle & Ciba, 1999; Poock & Lefond, 2001, 2003; Raisman, 2003; Schneider & Bruton, 2004; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). While not only serving as a powerful means for the distribution of information, institutional websites serve as a prevailing tool for admissions and recruiting offices’ marketing practices to prospective community college, undergraduate, graduate, and
professional students (Anctil, 2008; Gladieux & Swail, 1999a; 1999b; Hossler, 1999; Poock & Bishop, 2006; Poock & Lefond, 2001; Schneider, 2006). In addition, institutions are using their institutional websites to position themselves to appear more appealing and to differentiate from other similar institutions (Anctil, 2008; Frazier, 2003; Kittle, 2001; LeFauve, 2001; Rigol, 2003; Urciuoli, 2003). In order to represent their institutions, colleges and universities use a variety of textual and visual constructions to hail prospective students, among other target audiences and markets. Discourse on institutional websites contains an excess of promotional language and image in order to hail prospective students, among other target audiences, establish brand, which enhances identity, and ultimately prestige (Urciuoli, 2003, 2009). Despite the reliance upon institutional websites for such practices, a dearth of scholarship exists examining the role that institutional websites play in higher education (Saichaie, 2010). Even more limited is research examining the language and image that colleges and universities use to represent themselves on institutional websites (Saichaie, 2010).

Origins of Websites in Higher Education

By 1997, nearly every postsecondary institution operated a functional website (Kittle & Ciba, 1999), and since then, increasing efforts and resources have been funneled into website development and maintenance. As mentioned in Chapter 1, institutional spending on websites has ranged from tens of thousands to millions of dollars for the creating and maintenance of a website (Schneider & Bruton, 2004). Matching and exceeding the costs associated with website development are the amounts dedicated to establishing an identity (Anctil, 2008). Strout (2006) indicated that some institutions dedicate around 5% of their annual budgets to marketing and recruitment practices related to web-based activities, while others reported that for-profit institutions can spend nearly 20% of their annual budgets on these activities (Anctil, 2008). Paralleling the growth of advertising, marketing, and mass media techniques in higher education is the role of technology to deliver the institution’s message.
Information-gathering has been changed forever by the emergence of the Internet. The following section offers an overview of the growing research about colleges and universities’ use of websites as a means to represent the institution by providing information about the institution. The preponderance of research about college and university websites has attempted to ascertain the type of content students seek during their college-choice processes.

Websites and The College-Choice Process

Strauss’ (1998) doctoral thesis on websites and their role in the college-choice process marks one of the few instances of empirical research on the subject. Strauss’ sample included 289 recent graduates from Ohio State University and found that prospective college-going students used college and university websites during the search stage more than any other stage in the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) framework. Prospective students in the “search stage” of the college-choice process are not primarily interested in detailed information about individual institutions. Hossler et al. (1999) listed the areas of interest at this stage: admission selectivity, degree programs and majors offered, financial aid and total costs, general academic reputation, and other distinctive characteristics of campuses. Strauss did not look at language or images in use on institutional websites but rather focused on the types of computer hardware (e.g., modem, computer processor) and connectivity rate (e.g., dial-up), location of access (e.g., home, school, both), and other sources of information about college (e.g., viewbooks, peers, teachers, counselors). While Strauss’ work is important to understanding when and how students use institutional websites, the study is over a decade old, and with the rapid development of technology and the amplified use of institutional websites by admissions and recruitment offices at colleges and universities, some of the findings in the study are likely dated.

Over 3 years (1997-1999), Kittle and Ciba (1999) sampled 228 4-year institutions’ websites from across control (public and private) and type (research,
doctoral, master’s, baccalaureate) based on the 1994 Carnegie Classification. They focused on whether the institutions made applications, faculty, and tours primary components of their websites. Using a relationship-marketing framework (institutions use an approached aimed at generating a relationship with a target audience), they argued that applications, faculty, and tours were three elements colleges and universities used to represent the institution in an effort to build relationships with their target audience, namely prospective students. Each of these areas (application, faculty, and tours) has both a textual and visual element. For example, the instrument Kittle and Ciba used for examining faculty content was whether the website included vitae and/or faculty photos. Including vitae enables the viewer to ascertain the caliber of scholarship, experience, and research interests of the faculty member; the inclusion of a photo gives the viewer a chance to connect a name with an image. Kittle and Ciba stated, “Faculty-student relationships form the essence of the actual and perceived educational experience” (p. 22). Kittle and Ciba’s study revealed that “two-way” communication is increasingly prevalent on 4-year college and university websites. In addition, institutions utilized the ability to apply online information about faculty and the presence of virtual tours. Kittle and Ciba’s study, conducted at the genesis of college and universities’ implementation of websites as a component of admission and recruitment practices, demonstrated that from the very onset of the use of institutional websites for admissions and recruitment practices, colleges and universities were highly conscientious about the textual and visual representations.

A more recent academic research article related to websites in higher education is Poock and Lefond’s (2001) mixed-method study. Their study revealed that content is the primary reason why students access institutional websites. Poock and Lefond’s (2001) sample consisted of 55 college-bound students (juniors and seniors) in two states (Michigan and North Carolina) from four institutions (three public, one private). An overwhelming 97% of the students in the Poock and Lefond (2001) study reported that
admissions (e.g., admissions criteria, application process, cost, financial aid) and environmental (e.g., physical appearance of the campus, what the students look like, types of activities/clubs available) content were crucial aspects to an institution’s website. Organization of content and ease of navigation were other important factors for websites. In terms of organization of content, Poock and Leford (2001) found that students wanted the organization of content to be “visually intuitive” with “highly identifiable” links (p. 18). Information organized by “target group” (e.g., prospective students) rather than “function” (e.g., academics, admissions) was important to the students as well (p. 18). In terms of navigation, students did not want to “drill deeper” for content, meaning that the more a student had to “click-thru” links that directed to another web page, the higher the level of student frustration with the web page (p. 18). Poock and Lefond’s (2001) findings also suggested that students do not want too much information. Closely tied to the amount of content one has to “drill” through, students facing numerous pages layered with undesirable content became dissatisfied with the institution’s website. Students in the study emphasized the necessity for content to be easy to find in an intuitive way. Poock and Lefond (2001) reported that students unable to find content, such as an online application or downloadable application, faced higher levels of dissatisfaction with the website and ended their search for information.

Another interesting finding related to textual representation is that students preferred the term “majors” to “academic programs,” “departments,” and “colleges and schools” (Poock & Lefond, 2001, p. 18). Poock and Lefond (2001) stated that representation in this manner tended to puzzle students, leading to confusion and frustration when seeking information on a website. Regarding visual representations, Poock and Lefond (2001) found that the use of images to represent the environmental aspects of campus were the most important to students. Poock and Lefond (2001) reasoned that representations about the environmental elements helped students determine if they “fit in” at the particular institution (p. 19). Also, with regard to visual
representation, Poock and Lefond (2001) found that graphical images that did not align with the text on the website/page, or a graphical image that stood alone, did not resonate with students. Poock and Lefond (2001) posited that a ratio of 70:30, text to graphics/images, is ideal for websites.

The preponderance of the research examining websites has focused on undergraduate education, although Schneider’s (2006) study sought to uncover the textual and visual components of medical school websites. Specifically, Schneider tried to ascertain the difference between schools that offered a traditional medical (i.e., M.D.) program versus those that combined a bachelor’s (i.e., pre-med) with an M.D. program. Comparing data from 2001 and 2003, Schneider examined the content on the admissions websites of 20 medical programs, 10 traditional programs versus 10 combined programs. Schneider’s findings revealed that the content most often appearing was about admission, costs, curriculum, and reputation. Schneider (2006) also noted that over the span of the study, the number of photographs on the websites increased significantly for both the traditional programs (25% to 71%) and the combined programs (20% to 70%) in the sample; the only other content area to receive such a significant increase was related to information about residencies (25% to 95%). Schneider stated that the traditional and combined programs target distinctly different demographics; therefore, the type of content should reflect that difference. However, her findings suggested that traditional and combined programs use very similar textual and visual representations. Schneider’s conclusions are similar to existing research on admissions and recruiting practices that contain very similar textual and visual representations. In addition, her findings suggested that admissions and recruiting activities among medical programs are not exclusive to just undergraduate admissions and recruitment practices.

Venegas (2006) used focus groups and two case studies to better understand how college-bound (to either 2- or 4-year institutions), 12th-grade students accessed information about financial aid on the college and university websites. Venegas’ findings
revealed that many students visited the specific institution’s website for basic information about financial aid related to that particular institution. Her findings also suggested that the students in the study were able to determine that not all institutions’ websites presented information in a similar manner. For example, some of the institutions offered students the ability to apply for financial aid online, on the website, while others required them to print forms and then submit those same forms to the institution via postal mail or in person. Second, “as financial aid season progressed,” students relied more on the institution’s website for information about financial aid than on other online/offline resources (Venegas, 2006, p. 1659). Venegas’ findings are important to the current study because they serve as additional evidence underscoring the importance of institutional websites for information gathering and processing.

Ramasubramanian et al.’s (2002) research found that visuals are a vital component to communicating messages about higher education websites. Ramasubramanian et al. had 44 students examine variations in the images under four conditions on the websites of two fictitious institutions. The researchers were interested in determining if images of architecture (e.g., traditional and modern) and landscape (e.g., greenery such as lawns and trees) affected students’ impressions about the institution. Two of the websites contained images with context (e.g., traditional or modern architecture with greenery) and two contained images without context (e.g., traditional or modern architecture without greenery), or in isolation. The authors found that “college-bound students do form impressions about the more abstract qualities of an institution on the basis of visual images and its physical identity” (p. 64). For example, students in the study associated academic quality with “traditional architectural representations,” and images of this nature were correlated with institutional history, longevity, and tradition. In addition, Ramasubramanian et al. reported that academic prestige was associated with an “orderly” landscape (p. 65). The authors concluded that using architectural and landscape images to represent the institution has a powerful effect in confirming student
expectations about an institution. In order to meet student expectations, colleges and universities should employ images that show well-groomed lawns and landscapes and aesthetically appealing architecture. Ramasubramanian et al. posited that representations of this nature will create a positive impression of academic prestige and reputation; namely it will look like what college is “supposed” to look like to prospective students. In other words, “if the college or university looks good, it must be good” (Anctil, 2008, p. 82).

As noted in previous research on other means of representation used by colleges and universities in their admissions and recruitment practices, part of adopting commercial practices for marketing purposes commodifies higher education (Hartley & Morphew, 2008; McDonough, 1994). Reducing higher education to a commodity suggests that a bachelor’s degree is just another piece of merchandise (Bok, 2003). CDA provides a theoretical framework and methodological research tool to better understand the language used by colleges and universities to represent themselves on institutional websites.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

CDA is similar to traditional discourse analysis in that it emphasizes examination of linguistic artifacts (e.g., Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2005; van Dijk, 1993a). However, CDA has evolved as both a theory and a method residing within the critical paradigm and focuses on the relationship of power, language, and society (Gee, 2005; Rogers, 2004). Rogers et al. (2005) posited that the genesis of CDA stems from scholars’ desire to blend social theory and discourse analysis perspectives. Teun van Dijk (1993a) asserted that CDA represents “a shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic, and discourse analysis” (p. 131). Fairclough and Wodak (1997) presented the following tenets of CDA:

- discourse addresses social problems;
- discourse acknowledges power relations as discursive;
- discourse constitutes society and culture;
- discourse is historical;
- discourse does ideological work;
• a sociocognitive approach is needed to understand how relations between texts and society are mediated;
• discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory and uses a systematic methodology; and
• CDA is a socially committed scientific paradigm.

While adhering to these tenets, Rogers and her colleagues (2005) succinctly conceptualized CDA as a focus on “how language, as a cultural tool, mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge” (p. 367). CDA is also concerned with social problems and the linguistic character of cultural and social processes and structures (Richardson, 2007). To Fairclough (1995), the “critical” component of CDA implies knowing that causes and connections are often hidden. Through a systematic inquiry aimed at description, interpretation, and explanation of language in use, researchers can begin to uncover the causes and connections and link them to local, institutional, and societal matters (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 1995b; 2001). Therefore, CDA also concerns itself with what is not said, looking for the veiled meaning or “reading between the lines” since texts cannot be viewed in isolation and must always consider context. Fairclough (1995b) referred to this as “intertextuality” of messages. CDA is also useful for comparing textual and visual artifacts in relation to each other and over various points in time (Chiper, 2006; Richardson, 2007).

CDA comes in many varieties using a wide array of approaches (Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b; 2001; Gee, 2005). Rogers (2004) and her colleagues conducted an in-depth review of the literature exploring the various methodological approaches used by those purporting to use CDA. Their review did not elicit a dominant approach and, if anything, demonstrated the hybridization of methods depending on the intentions of the study for the researcher(s). CDA shares many of the methodological tools residing in qualitative research (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2005; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Written and oral texts provide the primary units of analysis for researchers utilizing CDA, and they may elicit data from interviews, conversations, policy and written documents,
audio/video recordings, and other social artifacts, such as websites (Bergman & Meier, 2004; Fairclough, 2001; Flick, 2009; Gee, 2005; Rogers, 2004; Rogers et. al, 2005; Talbot, 2007). The CDA lens provides an appropriate approach and tool for researchers looking at socially constructed texts embedded within messages so much so that noted CDA scholar Norman Fairclough extended his analytical framework to include media artifacts (Fairclough, 1995b). As a strand of CDA, media discourse uses a critical lens to examine the discourse of media messages over a variety of channels including websites, newspapers, television, radio, and other printed and visual material such as photographs and direct mail (Bell & Garrett, 1998; Richardson, 2007; Talbot, 2007). The use of CDA as a theoretical approach and methodological tool has merits as researchers attempt to understand the conflated factors that contribute to admissions and recruitment academic marketing materials. Fairclough (1992a, 1995a, 2001) argued that through the close, careful study of language, it is possible to not only describe and interpret representations, but also to explain the formation of relationships, processes, and structures that affect individuals. Since research examining the type of discourse present on college and university websites is limited, much remains unknown about the types of language present. However, what is known is that colleges vary widely by type, control, admissions selectivity and so forth, but what is unknown is whether institutions within or outside of a certain classification utilize language in similar or dissimilar ways to represent themselves. As previously mentioned, CDA is an appropriate tool for researchers interested in representations of social goods (e.g., class, gender, race, sexual orientation) (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001).

Critiques of CDA

Since CDA primarily deals with texts, some researchers see this as problematic due to the interpretive nature surrounding linguistic artifacts (Gee, 2005). Fairclough (2001) noted that the researcher needs to consciously be aware of the Member’s Resources (MR) he/she draws from when analyzing data and working with participants.
MR are the set of background knowledge a researcher brings to analysis (Fairclough, 2001). Researchers employing CDA make note of these characteristics in the researcher’s journal (Rogers, 2004). CDA is theoretically and methodologically flexible, and some scholars question the rigor of this approach. Rogers (2004) reported that critics often cite the disproportional amount of social theory or linguistic method in the research. Reviewers of CDA often point out that researchers are upfront about their beliefs and may misrepresent the data in order to find what they intended to find (Rogers, 2004, van Dijk 1993a, 1993b). Finally, some see CDA occurring in isolation, extracted out of the context (Fairclough, 1995). With regard to using media, specifically websites as sources of data, some also view media sources as “secondary sources,” and the ease of access is not in the spirit of true research (Bergman & Meier, 2004; Flick, 2009; Mitra & Cohen, 1999; Talbot, 2007). As CDA develops, it needs to demonstrate reflexivity while attending to the changing association connecting social theory and linguistic structures and how these connections evolve with social and linguistic theories and methodologies.

CDA as a Conceptual Framework

Kress (2000, 2004) argued that language, written, spoken, or visual, has multiple modes of representation and communicates different messages depending on the sociocultural context in which it is consumed. Through this lens, we understand that the multimodality of text and image affects individuals differently. It is also important to note that, as Fairclough (1992) suggested, discourses are deeply situated in social contexts, both reflecting context and constituting them. Fairclough (1993, 1995a, 2001) provides a useful theoretical framework that has three dimensions for researchers to employ to examine discourse and its meaning in social context. Analysis at each level permits the researcher to understand how language and image works from three different dimensions. Accompanying each dimension is a distinctive type of analysis: textual, process, and societal.
The first dimension is textual analysis, where the researcher uses the texts as the objects of analysis. The intent of this level of analysis is to describe the properties of the textual and visual elements. Textual analysis may incorporate verbal and/or visual “texts,” or a combination of the two. For example, repetition of words like “Distinguished,” “Top,” and “Leading” on an institutional website reaffirms the overall message. A website may also feature a logo or icon of a third-party publication’s ranking of the institutions (e.g., USN). Researchers (Fairclough, 1995b, 2001; Janks, 2005) also noted the increasing frequency of visuals and artifacts and how their presence interacts with the text. In some cases, visuals can operate in place of text, yet ultimately contributing to the discourse of the overall message (Hall, 1997).

The second dimension is process analysis, which involves interpretive analysis (Chapter 6). The goal is to unpack the message and look at its functional parts to understand and interpret the relationship between the data and its producers (Fairclough, 2001). In process analysis, the researcher focuses on the interactions among the various aspects of the production (e.g., design), distribution (e.g., World Wide Web), and consumption (e.g., listening, reading, viewing). Analysts then make interpretations based on the relationships evident in the message and identify what discourse practices speak to larger societal structures (Fairclough, 2001). When analysts operate at the process level, they enact an interpretive framework by systematically determining the dimensions of the situation as revealed in the data (Fairclough 1993, 1995a, 2001). At the process level, the analyst uses the (a) contents of the language, (b) its subjects, (c) the relationship of the subjects, and (d) the connections between the role of language and the greater social structures it reflects and supports. In other words, the “meaning” of the image may not exclusively reside in the image but in the composition of the image and the text (Hall, 1997). For the current study, different institutions represent information related to financial aid quite differently through the use of language and image (Venegas, 2006). Process Analysis allows the researcher look at the parts used to construct the message and
interpret these representations. The third dimension of analysis provides an opportunity to explain larger cultural, historical, political, and social discourses surrounding the data. Explanations about the language in context with cultural, historical, political, and social conditions and practices that help to shape it occur in this stage of analysis.

Figure 3: Fairclough’s Dimensions of Discourse and Discourse Analysis


Social conditions and social practices can be considered ways of controlling and preserving the selection of certain structural possibilities and the exclusion of others over time in certain areas of social life (Fairclough, 1995). At this stage of analysis, it is possible to examine the social effects and determinants of discourse in order to explain why such constructions are in use (Fairclough, 2001). Using the previous example, repetition of words like “Distinguished,” “Top,” and “Leading” represents an institution’s preoccupation to establish an identity that reflects some level of prestige, which may be an attempt to dispel a historically weak academic reputation.
Based on this model, Fairclough (2001) provided analysts with a means to explore the relationships between the “text and social structures” (p. 117). Using Fairclough’s approach allows for recursive movements between linguistic and social properties of texts and the ability to conduct a micro and macro analysis (Rogers, 2004).

CDA Studies Examining Viewbooks and Websites

Studies employing CDA to examine college and university representation are exceedingly rare (Askehave, 2007; Saichaie, 2010). The following section describes three studies that employed CDA to investigate the representation of colleges and universities in viewbooks and websites relevant to the proposed research.

Askehave (2007) utilized CDA to investigate textual and visual representations in international student prospectuses (i.e., viewbooks) from institutions in Australia, Finland, Japan, and Scotland. Askehave found that at the textual level, all four prospectuses contained similar constructions. For example, Askehave found “enabling” (e.g., encourages inter-disciplinary study, minimizing potential for problems) and support and service (e.g. offers advice) actions among primary textual representations in the prospectuses. In addition, each prospectus contained highly elucidatory descriptions of the institution. The University of Stirling in Scotland, the subject of in-depth analysis by Askehave, used the phrase, “most picturesque university campus in Europe,” to describe the institution. The visual representations supported the textual representations in many instances in Askehave’s analysis.

Students were the focus of 36 of the 46 photographs in the University of Stirling prospectus. Very few (n = 6) of the photographs contained images of students engaged in an academic activity. Only one of the photographs featured what Askehave (2007) called a “genuine teaching situation” (p. 737). Interestingly, the University of Stirling had no

---

2 With regard to visual data, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) identified a number of visual components that permit researchers using CDA to conduct analyses in a systematic manner. See Visual Analysis in Chapter 3 for more detail.
textual occurrences of the words “teach,” “study,” and “discuss,” textual representations traditionally associated with higher education in its prospectus (p. 733).

When taken as a whole, Askehave (2007) stated that the layout, design, and images of the prospectuses in her analysis represent themselves more closely to a “corporate profile brochure or a holiday destination catalogue” than an institution of higher education (p.731). Askehave’s study using CDA returned findings very similar to existing research on domestic viewbooks (Hartley & Morphew, 2008). Askehave’s conclusions are important to the current study for two reasons:

1. The results demonstrate that CDA is a viable theoretical approach and methodological tool to investigate textual and visual representations about college and university admission and recruitment material;

2. Application of CDA returns comparable results to those using more traditional methodological approaches.

Chiper (2006) used Fairclough’s approach to CDA in two phases of her study: analyzing how Romanian universities represented themselves to external and internal audiences on institutional websites; and comparing the Discourse on Romanian institutional websites with that of higher education institutions in the UK, France, Germany, and Italy. In phase one, Chiper examined the language used on 10 (both public and private) Romanian university websites. With regard to external audiences, Chiper’s results revealed “the marketization and commoditization of public discourse, the colonization of university discourse by the discourse of corporate management, reform and transition, the discourse of quality and of EU (European Union) institutions” (p. 720). With regard to internal communication, the language in use revealed a lack of institutional mission and leadership. Hampering internal communication efforts were Romanian universities’ supreme focus on efforts dedicated toward external audiences, Chiper concluded. Chiper also found that Business schools tended to employ “self-promotional marketing strategy in their discourse, and they opt for a dialogic discourse
that establishes a customer-service provider relationship with prospective students” (p. 719). While Chiper did not specifically examine images, she noted that graphics complemented the promotional discourse. When comparing the Discourse of Romanian universities to universities in the other EU countries, Chiper explained:

Universities in the UK address their various messages and postings to prospective, current, and former students. German university discourse is very dialogical in the case of younger universities, even joking at points. In France, a lot of emphasis is laid on facts and figures, whereas in Italy, university discourse is heavily colonized by the discourse of the EU and of educational reform at national level. (p. 722)

Chiper (2006) summarized by stating that universities in EU that were younger used more conversation indicating a promotional discourse targeted at prospective students while more established and older universities in her sample used language that was “dry, official, conservative, and opaque” concluding that the language in use forms a “homogeneity” (p. 722). This conclusion is particularly interesting as it aligns with the paucity of literature about the marketing practices of colleges and universities in the United States.

Like Chiper (2006), Saichaie (2010) utilized Fairclough’s approach to CDA to examine the textual and visual representations on the websites of 11 public universities in the United States. The overarching question of the study pertained to the types of discourse present on the “Why College or University X” page (e.g., Why K-State; Why Temple?; Why Wisconsin?). The rationale for this data stems from the research on the marketing of higher education stating that such a page often contains content related to several areas of prospective students’ interests such as academic reputation, financial aid, and student organizations and clubs (e.g., Poock & Lefond, 2001). Saichaie’s study found the language, both textual and visual, utilized by the institutions in the sample presented a very “generic” representation of the institutions. The institutions used similar language to describe a college experience filled with skill-building and leadership opportunities in a student-centered environment. Images of neatly landscaped campuses and happy, lively
students populated the pages. The page design incorporated school colors, but retained a high level of consistency within the sample (e.g., navigational menus, placement of images). The current study expands on Saichaie’s research providing a wider range of institutions by control, type, geographic location, and admissions selectivity. In addition, the current study includes a greater number of Web pages used for analysis. Lastly, the current study clarifies the utility of CDA when applied to textual and visual representations on the institutional websites.

Conclusion

This chapter supplied a description of the college-choice process that guides much of the research about this topic. Next, an overview of the emerging literature on admissions and recruitment marketing practices in higher education appeared, noting the increasing presence of the private sector in the marketing practices of admissions and recruitment offices at colleges and universities. Even in this digital era, traditional means of representation and identity-formation via viewbooks and mission statements still play an important role in the admissions and recruitment efforts of colleges and universities. Research related to the traditional means (e.g., viewbooks and mission statements) of representation was covered. Research on both viewbooks and mission statements has indicated that colleges and universities strive to differentiate themselves from other institutions yet are unwilling or unable to do so, providing very homogeneous representations whether through the use of language and/or image. Discourse of this nature is somewhat alarming, considering the diverse number of higher education institutions in the United States. In addition, this chapter noted the increasingly pivotal function of technology in the academic marketing practices of colleges and universities. An emerging area of research deals with colleges and universities’ use of institutional websites in academic marketing practices. The majority of the research on the subject discussed how institutional websites are used in the college-choice process and indicated that it plays a role in the early stages. Despite this fact, research is extremely limited and
does not wholly focus on the types of representational language and image used by colleges and universities.

The final section of Chapter 2 discussed CDA, its origins, critiques, and application to this study as well as the conceptual framework on which this study is founded. CDA is an appropriate theoretical and methodological approach to examine language constructed by social institutions such as colleges and universities. Fairclough (1992a, 1995a, 2001) postulated that through the close, careful study of language, it is possible to describe and interpret representations, as well as explain the formation of relationships, processes, and structures that affect individuals. The theoretical component to Fairclough’s (1993, 1995a, 2001) approach to discourse analysis focuses on the overt or seemingly obvious representations in language, but also the obscured or opaque messages veiled or embedded when given only a brief overview. Methodologically, CDA offers a process that can illuminate representations within the text, providing the researcher with a systematic set of inquiries to analyze both textual and visual constructs in relation to social phenomena. Based on this model, Fairclough (2001) provided analysts with a means to explore the relationships between the “text and social structures” (p. 117). Fairclough’s approach permits the researcher to recursively move between linguistic and social properties of language in order to conduct a micro and macro analysis (Rogers, 2004). Lastly, this chapter contained a presentation of the limited research using CDA to examine language and image in the academic marketing materials produced by colleges and universities. Not only is the existing research on institutional websites narrow, it does not fully address the types of language and image in use and the larger discourse that forms on institutional websites.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodology for the study. This study focuses on types of Discourses active on college and university websites and revolves around the following overarching research question:

Research Question

- In what ways do colleges and universities use language (textual and visual) to represent themselves on institutional websites?

As previously mentioned, given that much is unknown about the nature of discourse on college and university websites; therefore the overarching question above serves as the principal guide to understand discourse at the local, institutional, and societal levels. Fairclough’s approach to CDA allowed the researcher to discursively and systematically analyze language and image at these levels and is appropriate as a research tool used to examine language on college and university websites. The following sub-questions provide a more specific focus related to CDA.

Research Sub-Questions

1. What similarities/dissimilarities exist in the language used to represent institutions within similar institutional types?
2. What similarities/dissimilarities exist in the language used to represent the institutions of dissimilar institutional types?
3. How are social goods (e.g., class, gender, race, sexual orientation) represented in the language used on institutional websites between and within classifications?

The remainder of this chapter features discussions of the relevant information related to the methodology of the proposed research. The presentation of sections is as follows: research design, data collection, protection of subjects, sample (including sample
descriptions), sample rationale, method, criteria for scientific rigor, the role of the researcher, and the researcher’s journal.

**Research Design**

A qualitative research paradigm was selected to explore language that colleges and universities use to represent themselves on institutional websites. An aim of qualitative research is to understand the context and conditions that affect the actions and meanings that construct and are constructed by social participants and institutions like colleges and universities (Fairclough, 1995; Flick 2009; Merriam, 1998). With qualitative research, the process is often iterative, containing many disparate paths. As Creswell (2003) stated, “qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly preconfigured” (p. 181). As previously mentioned, CDA is an emergent type of research method that permits researchers to take text and image from seemingly neutral representations and explore the nature of the interaction between the two that form Discourse. CDA is appropriate for exploratory research, such as the current study, as a means to describe, analyze, and interpret textual and visual representations at local, institutional, and societal levels (e.g., Askehave, 2007; Chiper, 2006; Fairclough, 1995, 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Hall, 1997).

**Data Collection**

Denzin (2004) depicted researchers using online data as “interpretative bricoleurs” who understand that online research is an interpretative process molded by the political and economic dimensions of their work (p. 5). Collection of data for this study took many interconnected paths, as research employing CDA is rarely linear (Janks, 1997; Mautner, 2005a). This notion is in harmony with the aims of CDA as economic, historical, and political dimensions are components of social practice (Fairclough, 2001).

Data collection times were November 2010 and January 2011. Rationale for collection times stemmed from research suggesting that these months are when students
actively gather information about college; naturally, admissions and recruitment offices are aware of this and alter, edit, and update content accordingly (Hossler et al., 1999). The reasoning behind the multiple collection times was twofold: permitted the researcher to examine changes in representational language and image at two points in time; and strengthened internal validity in an attempt to triangulate by providing multiple points of data (Chiper, 2006; Flick, 2009; Merriam, 1998). All of the data used in this study were available on publicly accessible websites.

Protection of Human Subjects

The units of analysis were institutional websites and Web pages that were available for public consumption on the Internet. The data were not collected through “interventional or interaction with the individual” and did not provide “identifiable private information”; therefore, the data did not pose a risk to human participants nor fall under the purview of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Iowa. Moreover, since there was no personal information or participant involvement, ethics approval was not necessary for the study (Strong & Gilmour, 2009).

Sample

The following section describes the sample selected for the current study. A purposeful sampling technique was used to generate the sample for the study. Purposeful sampling is the intentional selection of a sample that allows the researcher to focus in great detail on a certain issue, subject, or phenomenon (Flick, 2009; Patton, 2002; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 2002, p. 230, emphasis existing). Purposeful sampling is appropriate for researchers who want to investigate online material such as websites and web pages (Creswell, 2003; Flick, 2009; Gee, 2005).

Within each group of the sample were institutions with similar undergraduate instructional programs based on their 2010 Carnegie Classification (Carnegie Foundation, 2010). The grouping of institutions was consistent with existing research examining
representations in textual and visual elements in admission and recruitment materials distributed by colleges and universities (e.g., Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Morphew & Taylor, 2010). Within each group were similarities across admission rate, area (rural, suburban, urban), athletic conference membership, control (public or private), degree level, geographic location, student body type, and size. Between each group was a significant amount of variance. For example, Princeton University and Harvard University share many characteristics, as do Birmingham-Southern College and Centre College, yet Princeton University and Centre College are two vastly different institutions. It is possible that Princeton University and Centre College use language and image in their admissions and recruitment practices quite differently; however, the dearth of scholarship does not explicate this assumption (Saichaie, 2010). In essence, the selection of institutions within each group was purposeful due to the number of similarities they seemingly shared according to standard classifications in higher education (e.g., Carnegie Classification). The institutions were grouped to examine how the text and image in use on websites of institutions compared among each group. Utilizing Fairclough’s (1993, 1995a, 2001) method of CDA permitted the researcher to examine discourse at the local level in order to make interpretations about Discourse at the societal level. Table 1 summarizes the Undergraduate Instructional Program Classification from the Carnegie Foundation (Carnegie Foundation, 2010).

Group One

Group One (Indiana University-Bloomington, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the University of Iowa) was a set of public research universities “RI universities.” According to the 2010 Carnegie Classification, all institutions in Group One were classified as balanced arts and sciences/professions, high graduate
Table 1: Sample Institutions and 2010 Carnegie Classification Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Number &amp; Institutions</th>
<th>Carnegie Classification</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description *a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group One:</strong> Indiana University-Bloomington; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; The University of Iowa</td>
<td>Balanced arts &amp; sciences/professions, high graduate coexistence</td>
<td>Bal/HGC</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree majors were relatively balanced between arts and sciences and professional fields (41–59 percent in each), and graduate degrees were observed in at least half of the fields corresponding to undergraduate majors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Two:</strong> Harvard University; Princeton University; Stanford University</td>
<td>Arts &amp; sciences focus, high graduate coexistence</td>
<td>A&amp;S-F/HGC</td>
<td>At least 80 percent of bachelor’s degree majors were in the arts and sciences, and graduate degrees were observed in at least half of the fields corresponding to undergraduate majors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Three:</strong> Birmingham-Southern College*; Centre College; Rhodes College</td>
<td>Arts &amp; sciences plus professions, some graduate coexistence; Arts &amp; sciences plus professions, no graduate coexistence.</td>
<td>A&amp;S+Prof/SGC; A&amp;S+Prof/NGC</td>
<td>60–79 percent of bachelor’s degree majors were in the arts and sciences, and graduate degrees were observed in some of the fields corresponding to undergraduate majors (but less than half).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Four:</strong> Eastern Washington University; Humboldt State University; Southern Oregon University</td>
<td>Professions plus arts &amp; sciences, some graduate coexistence</td>
<td>Prof+A&amp;S/SGC</td>
<td>60–79 percent of bachelor’s degree majors were in professional fields, and graduate degrees were observed in some of the fields corresponding to undergraduate majors (but less than half).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a All descriptions come from the 2010 Carnegie Classification Description of Undergraduate Instructional Program Classification retrieved from http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org DESCRIPTIONS/UGRAD_PROGRAM.php
coexistence (Bal/HGC). These institutions feature high graduate coexistence, have equivalent level (4 year or above), control (public), and undergraduate enrollment (more than 20,000), and are essentially the flagship university in each state. Additionally, each shared congruency with enrollment profile (high undergraduate) and undergraduate profile (full-time, 4-year) and have very high research activity. Each institution in Group One had a highly residential setting as well.

The greatest difference within Group One related to admission rate and selectivity, which ranged from very difficult (65% admittance) to moderately difficulty (83% admittance). The second area of difference dealt with area (two rural and one urban). However, all were in the Midwest region of the United States. All members in Group One were also members of the same athletic conference (Big 10) and the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC).

Group Two

Group Two (Harvard University, Princeton University, Stanford University) contained research universities traditionally thought to be among the “elite” in higher education (Litten, 1991). All institutions admitted only 7% to 10% of applicants. All institutions had equivalent level (4 year or above), control (private, not-for-profit), and undergraduate enrollment (less than 6,700). All had Arts and Sciences (A&S-F/HGC) focused undergraduate instructional programs featuring high graduate coexistence. In addition, each shared congruency with enrollment profile (high graduate/professional) and undergraduate profile (full-time, 4-year) and had very high research activity. Each institution in Group Two had a highly residential setting as well.

The greatest difference within this group related to geography (two East Coast, one West Coast) and area (two suburban and one urban). With regard to athletics, two (Harvard and Princeton) were members of the Ivy League while one (Stanford) was a member of the Pacific Ten Conference. The rationale for selecting institutions that varied within this group was to include an elite, private institution from the Western part of the
United States that had a similar set of Carnegie Classification characteristics as the East Coast counterparts. An additional difference dealt with Princeton’s exact classification by the Carnegie Foundation as Arts and Sciences plus professions, high graduate coexistence (A&S+Prof/HGC). This was likely due to the affiliation with Princeton’s Theological Seminary. However, due to the alignment of other key characteristics, Princeton remained rational for inclusion in the sample.

Group Three

Group Three (Birmingham-Southern University, Centre College, Rhodes College) was a set of small private, baccalaureate colleges. All of institutions in the group had the equivalent level (4 year or above), control (private, not-for-profit), and undergraduate enrollment (between 1000 and 1700). All had Arts and Sciences focused undergraduate instructional programs featuring some (A&S+Prof/SGC) to no graduate coexistence (A&S-F/NGC). In addition, each shared congruency with enrollment profile (exclusively to high undergraduate), undergraduate profile (full-time, 4-year), and a highly residential setting.

The greatest difference within this group related to admission rate and selectivity, which ranged from very difficult (42% admittance) to moderately difficulty (69% admittance). The second area of difference dealt with area (one rural, one suburban, and one urban). However, all were in the Southern region of the United States and were members in the same athletic conference (Southern Collegiate Athletic Conference).

Group Four

Group Four (Eastern Washington University, Humboldt State University, Southern Oregon University) was a set of regional, comprehensive, public universities. All of institutions in the group had the equivalent level (4 year or above), control (public), and undergraduate enrollment (less than 10,000). Group Four had a comparable admission rate and selectivity, moderately difficult (greater than 80% admittance).
Table 2: Sample Institutions and Key Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location (Area)</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Student Type (Setting)</th>
<th>Undergraduate Enrollment a</th>
<th>Admission Rate &amp; Selectivity b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 1: Research I – Balanced arts &amp; sciences/professions, high graduate coexistence – Bal/HGC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana University – Bloomington</td>
<td>Bloomington, IN (Rural)</td>
<td>Public (State-supported)</td>
<td>Coed (Residential)</td>
<td>32,490, 50% women, 50% men</td>
<td>Moderately difficult, 73% of applicants were admitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign</td>
<td>Champaign, IL (Urban)</td>
<td>Public (State-supported)</td>
<td>Coed (Residential)</td>
<td>31,477, 46% women, 54% men</td>
<td>Very difficult, 65% of applicants were admitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Iowa</td>
<td>Iowa City, IA (Rural)</td>
<td>Public (State-supported)</td>
<td>Coed (Residential)</td>
<td>20,574, 52% women, 48% men</td>
<td>Moderately difficult, 83% of applicants were admitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 2: Elite Institutions – Arts &amp; sciences focus, high graduate coexistence – A&amp;S-F/HGC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvard University</td>
<td>Cambridge, MA (Urban)</td>
<td>Private (Not-for-profit)</td>
<td>Coed (Residential)</td>
<td>6,655, 51% women, 49% men</td>
<td>Most difficult, 7% of applicants were admitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princeton University</td>
<td>Princeton, NJ (Suburban)</td>
<td>Private (Not-for-profit)</td>
<td>Coed (Residential)</td>
<td>5,113, 49% women, 51% men</td>
<td>Most difficult, 10% of applicants were admitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanford, University</td>
<td>Stanford, CA (Suburban)</td>
<td>Private (Not-for-profit)</td>
<td>Coed (Residential)</td>
<td>6,602, 49% women, 51% men</td>
<td>Most difficult, 8% of applicants were admitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em><em>Group 3 – Baccalaureate Colleges – Arts and sciences, focus, some or no graduate coexistence – A&amp;S+Prof/SGC</em> or A&amp;S+Prof/NGC</em>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham-Southern College*</td>
<td>Birmingham, AL (Urban)</td>
<td>Private (Not-for-profit)</td>
<td>Coed (Residential)</td>
<td>1,508, 50% women, 50% men</td>
<td>Moderately difficult, 59% of applicants were admitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre College</td>
<td>Danville, KY (Rural)</td>
<td>Private (Not-for-profit)</td>
<td>Coed (Residential)</td>
<td>1,216, 55% women, 45% men</td>
<td>Moderately difficult, 69% of applicants were admitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhodes College</td>
<td>Memphis, TN (Suburban)</td>
<td>Private (Not-for-profit)</td>
<td>Coed (Residential)</td>
<td>1,675, 57% women, 43% men</td>
<td>Very difficult, 42% of applicants were admitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 4 – Public Comprehensives – Arts &amp; sciences focus, plus professions, some graduate coexistence A&amp;S+Prof/SGC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humboldt State University</td>
<td>Arcata, CA (Rural)</td>
<td>Public (State-supported)</td>
<td>Coed (non-Residential)</td>
<td>7,169, 54% women, 46% men</td>
<td>Moderately difficult, 84% of applicants were admitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Oregon University</td>
<td>Ashland, OR (Rural)</td>
<td>Public (State-supported)</td>
<td>Coed (non-Residential)</td>
<td>4,426, 57% women, 43% men</td>
<td>Moderately difficult, 89% of applicants were admitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Washington University</td>
<td>Cheney, WA (Rural)</td>
<td>Public (State-supported)</td>
<td>Coed (non-Residential)</td>
<td>9,919, 55% women, 45% men</td>
<td>Moderately difficult, 82% of applicants were admitted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a, b Retrieved from Peterson’s Comprehensive Guide to College Information (www.petersons.com) in September 2010 and are derived from National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) 2009-2010 academic year data.
All had a Carnegie Classification of Arts and Sciences, plus professions, focused undergraduate instructional programs featuring some graduate coexistence (A&S+Prof/SGC). Additionally, each shared congruency with enrollment profile (high undergraduate, high transfer-in), undergraduate profile (full-time, 4-year), and a primarily non-residential setting. All were located in rural communities in the West-Northwest region of the United States.

The greatest difference within Group 4 related to athletic conference membership. Eastern Washington University was a member of the Big Sky Athletic Conference, Humboldt State was a member of California Collegiate Athletic Association, and Southern Oregon was a member of the Cascade Collegiate Conference. Despite the incongruity in athletic conference membership, Group Four was a reasonable combination based on the numerous corresponding characteristics noted above.

Sample Rationale

In order to conduct a close analysis, a manageable sample is necessary for those employing CDA (Askehave, 2007; Pitts, 2004); therefore, for the current study, 12 institutions were purposefully selected from the 2010 Carnegie Classification (2010) list of institutions. Another reason for selecting a small sample aligns with the nature of exploratory research (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). In addition, researchers utilizing CDA will repeatedly and recursively reexamine data multiple times in an effort to fully analyze the obvious and embedded representations in language and image (Rogers, 2005).

The placement of institutions into groups aligned with the research questions, in particular the sub-research questions that guided this study. The reason for sample selection is somewhat analogous to an analysis of variance (ANOVA) in which researchers are interested in differences within and between groups (Allison, 1999). Selecting a sample that contained homogeneity within each group while difference and variation existed between and among groups permitted the researcher to examine the
language of groups that logically might represent themselves similarly. Such sample construction allowed the researcher to examine similar and dissimilar institutions within the scope of one study. Sample selection of this matter is in concert with the theoretical and methodological parameters of CDA because it can be used to examine differences among comparable and contrasting artifacts (Chiper, 2006; Fairclough, 1995b; Richardson, 2007). In addition, the flexibility of Fairclough’s framework makes such an analysis possible (Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 2001).

Sample content was available on 12 institutional websites. Data were collected from the following web pages on the institutional websites in the sample:

1. College or University Home Page (e.g. www.collegeuniversityX.edu)
2. The “About” page that describes the institution (i.e., location, founding year, size of campus, academic reputation)
3. Admissions or Prospective Student(s) or Freshman or First-Year or Undergraduate page
4. Web pages describing academic majors and/or programs of study
5. Web pages describing financial aid, costs, or paying for higher education
6. Web pages describing student life, activities and/or organizations

Literature on college-choice illuminates the rationale for selection of this data. Prospective students are interested in admission selectivity, total costs and financial aid, general academic reputation, majors and programs offered, student life activities, and other unique characteristics of campuses (Hartman, 1998; Hossler, 1999; Hossler et al., 1989; McDonough, 1997). Often websites contain web pages offering a response to this type of inquiry. In many instances, these websites contain a “landing page” that consists of topical areas related to the six areas described above and contains hyperlinks to other web pages. For example, the portion of the website dedicated to “financial aid” may contain several links to other related areas like scholarships, loan information, and off-campus employment (Venegas, 2006). In those instances, one degree of separation (or
one click through) occurred, and the researcher navigated to the page that most directly related to “financial aid” or “costs” (McDonough, 1997; Mitra & Cohen, 1999; Poock & Lefond, 2001). This seemingly short path to information is consistent with research on students who faced increasing frustration as they had to “drill deeper” in search of the information they needed and was made specifically available to them (Poock & Lefond, 2001, p. 18). The researcher documented the decision-making process in the Researcher’s Journal (see section below).

It is worth noting that despite this path, the interconnectivity of websites and web pages created an almost impossible path to replicate because web browsing varies greatly by individual (Bergman & Meier, 2004; Mitra & Cohen, 1999). Since the central inquiry of the current research was to describe, interpret, and analyze the language and images colleges and universities use to represent themselves on institutional websites, sequential analysis was not part of this study. Bergman and Meier (2004) asked: “Can the sequencing of activities such as the way the eye of the observer travels in any sense be documented?” (p. 246). This is an interesting question and may serve as a foundation for future research.

Collection of data did not follow a specific path beyond a degree of separation (i.e., one click through) past the home page to the topical areas listed above. When topical websites presented numerous hyperlinks and options, the researcher attempted to locate the most appropriate web page, based on the topics above, within one degree of separation (i.e., one click through). All decisions regarding this process were recorded in the Researcher’s Journal. This type of planned flexibility is necessary for research investigating changing artifacts such as websites and web pages (Bergman & Meier, 2004; Flick, 2009; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).
Method

A strength of CDA is in its capacity to show the power relations of apparently neutral textual and visual artifacts (Luke, 1996). The following section provides a description of the research tools used for the proposed study.

Textual Analysis

Janks (2005) developed a rubric for linguistic analysis based on Fairclough’s theoretical approach to CDA, providing a method of inquiry for examining the language on institutional websites. The utility of this approach allows analysts to recursively converge on the signifiers that make up the text, the specific linguistic selections, their arrangement, layout, sequence, and juxtaposition (Janks, 2005). Utilizing Janks’ rubric allowed for a systematic analysis specifically designed for employing Fairclough’s framework (Janks, 2005; Rogers, 2004). Coding followed selected aspects of linguistic features in Janks’ (2005) linguistic rubric and were aggregated electronically for analysis (see Appendix A). Included in Appendix A is a list of working definitions and terms specific to Janks’ rubric for researchers employing Fairclough’s method.

Visual Analysis

Similarly, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) developed a systematic manner in which to examine images, including those on institutional websites. Kress and van Leeuwen, along with other researchers (e.g., Bergman & Meier, 2004; Flick, 2009; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Mitra & Cohen, 1999), stated that methods for visual analysis are still in the developmental stages and vary widely depending on the type of research. Visuals are often open to a variety of interpretation so researchers should employ methods that fit specific research questions (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Recall that Kress and van Leeuwen developed their rubric with CDA in mind; therefore, many elements in their rubric attempted to assist in the analysis of images from this perspective. Visual elements were coded using selected aspects of the Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) rubric (see Appendix B) and were aggregated electronically for analysis. Included in Appendix B is
a list of working definitions and terms consistent with Kress and van Leeuwen’s rubric for researchers employing Fairclough’s method.

Research Process

Web pages were printed and the researcher conducted a paper-and-pencil analysis of the websites, and later aggregated electronically (Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Mautner, 2005a; Strong & Gilmour, 2009). Screen captures of each of the Web pages over the two collection times occurred. Web pages were also saved in HTML (hypertext markup language) in an effort to preserve textual and visual representations on institutional websites. Creating an “offline” copy of a website permitted the researcher to recursively conduct analysis numerous times to closely preserve the dynamic and static contents and interconnectivity of the original, “online” website (Bergman & Meier, 2004). When faced with interactive content, the researcher documented the nature of the content in accordance with the rubrics previously mentioned. Doing so was consistent with the current practice related to interactive content on websites (Bergman & Meier, 2004). Decisions were documented in the Researcher’s Journal.

It is worth mentioning that the description and analysis of visual texts (e.g., images, graphics, and multimedia) often occurred in conjunction, often simultaneously, with written text, and this was consistent with previous research utilizing CDA to examine textual and visual artifacts (Askehave, 2007; Hall, 1997; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). While the current study presents methods on how to analyze language and text separately, the process and societal levels of Fairclough’s theoretical framework permits researchers to make interpretations and draw conclusions based not only on the language, or image(s), but also on the combination of the two (Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 2001; Janks, 2005; Rogers, 2004).

Criteria for Scientific Rigor

CDA has origins and draws strength from the coinciding and scientifically recognized traditions of discourse studies, feminist post-structuralism, and critical
linguistics and has been utilized in a variety of disciplines including education, media studies, history, and politics (Agger, 1991; Fairclough, 1992a, 1995a, 1995b, 2001; Rogers et al., 2005; van Dijk, 1993b). Drawing from Carspecken (1996) and Gee (2005) provides the most current and cohesive discussion regarding validity for CDA. Gee argued that validity is a social construct and research, no matter the method, has an agenda. Since humans construct their own realities, the notion that validity is “once and for all” does not resonate with Gee, a concept he urged those employing and critiquing CDA to be consciously aware (p. 113). Because critical discourse analysts take a reflexive position with language: what makes meaning to one researcher may vary to the next based on the interpretive lens. This does not mean CDA is subjective, rather it provides researchers with multiple interpretive tools (Gee, 2005; Rogers, 2004). Finally, what makes CDA valid is the connection to grammatical devices in communicative functions of language (Gee, 2005). For the current study, the use of Janks’ (2005) linguistic analysis rubric and a visual analysis rubric derived from the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), both of which are grounded in the work of system functional linguist, Halliday (1985), provided an explicit attempt to systematically ensure rigor. In addition, the researcher consulted with an expert reviewer throughout the duration of the research project and documented the entire research process in a journal (see Researcher’s Journal section for more detail).

Role of the Researcher

Due to the nature of qualitative research methodologies, the role of the researcher is crucial. The researcher is the principal instrument for data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results; therefore, it is essential to disclose personal assumptions, bias, and member resources (e.g., Creswell, 2003; Gee, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998). Following a Faircloughian approach, a researcher is up front about his/her member’s resources at the onset of the study and especially during in the interpretation stage (see above). Furthermore, a key component to research in a critical
paradigm is the acknowledgement subjectivities in the role of the researcher (Fairclough, 2001; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2001).

The subject of inquiry stems from multiple perspectives in my personal and professional history that enhanced my knowledge and sensitivity of the topic of inquiry. As an individual from an underrepresented population, the prospect of attending college was filled with confusion. My father emigrated from another country to seek a master’s degree and instilled the value of higher education in our family from a very early age. Often, I remember him telling us how puzzling the whole process was; he was a first-generation student, and he had the added challenge of language and cultural adaptations to make as well. While I did not have such drastic conditions to overcome, the preponderance of my college-choice process was perplexing. I remember receiving a plethora of marketing materials from admissions and recruiting offices throughout the nation. My experience was at the genesis of the implementation of institutional websites for admission and recruitment practices. I recall feeling frustration when using websites because of both inability and lack of access to the content. During this time (1997-1998), most institutions had only rudimentary websites, and connectivity was slow and inconsistent (Kittle & Ciba, 1999; Strauss, 1998). Over the last decade, with the rapid advancement and sophistication of technology, along with the growing multitude of sources of content, I can only imagine what students in this process collect to inform their college-choice process—especially those from first-generation, underrepresented populations or some other form of minority standing.

As an individual who works with admissions and recruitment materials and multimedia technology, I find the manner in which colleges and universities market themselves worthy of further exploration. During my time at the University of Iowa, I experienced the numerous ways in which the University attempted to market itself to target audiences, namely prospective students. As an employee of the Office of Admissions, I contributed to the academic marketing efforts at the university, producing a
range of web-based content aimed at particular prospective students. This experience offered me a unique position that undoubtedly factored into my analysis of the language by higher education institutions.

I also have a depth of experience working with academic, information, and instructional technologies. This experience instilled in me further knowledge about the technical aspects involved with the creation and maintenance of websites. In addition, my experience working as an instructional technology consultant afforded insight into the ways to implement technology so that it will engage the minds of traditional-aged college-going students (18-24 years).

Furthermore, my experience as a mass media professional in the fields of broadcasting, journalism, and promotion served as a set of resources to understand the numerous techniques in the academic marketing practices of colleges and universities. Working with a variety of media outlets in a number of different positions supplied a rich experience into the construction of messages using language.

My experience as faculty at the postsecondary level (small private, baccalaureate college in the Midwest) provided further resources for this inquiry. I taught a number of courses about message construction and production for a variety of audiences ranging from broadcast news to commercial production to public relations. As a faculty member, I participated in several committees charged with enhancing admissions and recruitment practices. Part of my committee work involved consulting and making recommendations for appropriate ways to implement technology on campus.

As the Internet takes center stage as the primary medium of message delivery, it is important to analyze the language used to produce and reproduce existing social structures on websites. With the explosion of content, deciphering what is information from what is advertising copy has considerable consequences for those going through the college-choice process and as higher education institutions endeavor to create an identity in the face of increasing competition for scarce resources.
During my doctoral experience, the comprehensive exposure to the realm of higher education ignited my interest to focus on how institutions represent themselves and establish an identity. Formal contact with the fields of semiotics and textual discourse analysis came during my educational experience. Due to the lack of research examining how colleges and universities harness institutional websites, the current study offers a contribution to the exploratory work on the subject and may serve as the foundation for future research. Lastly, an area of interest for future research includes examining the ways colleges and universities market their institutions.

My current and prior experiences as an admissions media producer, mass media professional, technology consultant, and faculty member, along with my future as an academician and administrator, uniquely position me and fuel my desire to examine how colleges and universities use language to represent themselves on institutional websites.

Researcher’s Journal

Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (2006) posited that a researcher’s journal supports the researcher when investigating emic and etic matters pertaining to the variety of theoretical and methodological research perspectives. Specifically, the researcher’s journal serves to maintain awareness of biases and permits the researcher to remain receptive to the experiences and perceptions that shape personal member resources. I used the researcher’s journal as a repository for questions encountered and decisions made during all levels of the current research. For example, coding decisions and systematic reflection provided me with an outlet to honestly and openly record thoughts that affect the research process. Another example relates to choices I made about what pages to analyze when related content that appears on websites contains hyperlinks to other Web pages (discussed in the Sample Rationale section above). A researcher’s journal also permits the researcher to organize data analysis, interpretations, and understanding during the various stages of the research process (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 2006). Specific to CDA, the researcher’s journal is used to document analytic
decisions and to account for social changes over time (Rogers, 2004). Fairclough (1995b) posited that such measures are necessary in the explanatory stages of CDA as a system of accountability and to ensure research reflexivity.

Silverman and Marvasti (2008) suggested that analysis and writing “coexist” in qualitative research, and knowing how to separate the two comes with deciding what to include when reporting findings (p. 52). I utilized the researcher’s journal as a part of a strategy to mitigate factors that shape preconceptions regarding the themes that stem from the data. In the current study, I took every effort to ensure validity, trustworthiness, and the rigor that accompanies scientific endeavors into social research. Despite these adherences, my biases contributed to all the stages of this study and the conclusions emanating from this work are solely my own.
CHAPTER 4
TEXTUAL FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to understand how colleges and universities use language, both textual and visual, to represent themselves to prospective students on their institutional websites. Organizations like colleges and universities seek to create and maintain a distinctive identity in an effort to build economic and social strength (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). A primary outlet for communicating institutional identity is on the Internet through institutional websites. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed report of the ways colleges and universities in the sample used language, specifically the textual representations.

The findings focus on the emergent themes from the data followed by examples to illuminate the points. Previous research on the marketing of higher education and germane linguistic features from the literature on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) informs the reporting of the themes (see Chapter 2). Organization of the findings revolves around six specific Web pages within the institutional websites:

1. College or University Home Page (e.g. www.collegeuniversityX.edu)
2. The “About” page that describes the institution (i.e., location, founding year, size of campus, academic reputation)
3. Admissions or Prospective Student(s) or Freshman or First-Year or Undergraduate page
4. Web pages describing academic majors and/or programs of study
5. Web pages describing financial aid, costs, or paying for higher education
6. Web pages describing student life, activities and/or organizations

This arrangement allows for a cohesive presentation on how institutions use language, the similarities and dissimilarities that occur among them, and the representation of social goods (e.g., class, gender, race, sexual orientation). A preliminary analysis concludes
each section. The findings of the visual representations appear in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 discusses the application of the conceptual framework offered by CDA to interpret explain the data. Chapter 7 contains an extended analysis and a response to the research questions guiding the study. Lastly, Chapter 7 closes with implications for practice and indications for future research.

**Review of the Sample**

The following section briefly reviews characteristics of the institutions in each of the groups. Similarities within each group pertain to admission rate (percentage admitted), area (rural, suburban, urban), athletic conference membership, control (public or private), level (length of degree programs), location (geographic region), student type (student body type), and undergraduate enrollment (number of undergraduates). For more detail consult the Sample section in Chapter 3. Group One (G1) institutions are: Indiana University-Bloomington (IU), the University of Iowa (UI), and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Group Two (G2) institutions are: Harvard University (HU), Princeton University (PU), and Stanford University (SU). Note that SU is not in the same geographic region or athletic conference as HU and PU. However, SU shares many other characteristics (e.g., admissions rate, control) as HU and PU. Group Three (G3) institutions are: Birmingham-Southern College (BSC), Centre College (CC), and Rhodes College (RC). The institutions in Group Four (G4) are: Eastern Washington University (EWU), Humboldt State University (HSU), and Southern Oregon University (SOU). Note that the greatest difference within Group 4 relates to athletic conference membership. Eastern Washington University is a member of the Big Sky Athletic Conference, Humboldt State is a member of California Collegiate Athletic Association, and Southern Oregon is a member of the Cascade Collegiate Conference. Despite the

---

3 Both Chapters 4 and 5 contain an a-conceptual analysis of the data. Application of the conceptual framework appears in Chapter 6.
incongruity in athletic conference membership, Group Four is a reasonable combination based on the numerous corresponding characteristics detailed in Chapter 3.

**Home Page**

**Descriptive Analysis**

The discourse on the Home Page focuses on current institutional acclamations, activities of institutional actors, and access to additional content. In essence, an institution’s Home Page functions as a billboard for its current achievements and to establish its identity. Representations feature a prominent faculty member, student accomplishments (past and present), and institutional or departmental recognition. For example, UIUC trumpets an achievement by a faculty member, “Engineering prof wins Presidential Early Career Award.”4 Similar constructions appear in G2 as HU states, “Harvard student, lecturer discover unknown Darwin letter.”5 Likewise, G3 and G4 institutions announce their commendations. CC states, “Centre receives NSF grand for renovation of older sections of Young Hall,”6 and, from G4, “SOU Schneider Museum of Art Receives Miller Foundation Grant.”7 These items feature near the top of the Home Page and function as the primary content on the page, often appearing as a caption to a large primary image (see Chapter 5).

Secondary content, in the form of “news” and “events,” appears and function as complementary evidence to showcase the breadth and depth of the activities going on at the institution. Frequently, these items highlight the successes of a student, faculty member, department, or team. For example, on the PU page the following appears: “FTC

---

4 Retrieved from: http://illinois.edu/ 01/07/11
5 Retrieved from: http://www.harvard.edu 01/07/11
6 Retrieved from: http://www.centre.edu 01/07/11
7 Retrieved from: http://www.sou.edu 01/07/11
appoints Princeton computer scientist as chief technologist.” The Eastern Washington promotes the feats of its athletic department, specifically its football team, with an announcement from the state’s capitol, “This Friday has been declared EWU Eagles Day in the state of Washington.” The association of the notable works of the institution and its actors with prestigious recognition functions as tangible evidence that distinguishes the institution from competing educational outlets, namely its peers. Institutions draw referent power from the accolades and activities as supporting materials used in the construction and promotion of institutional identity.

The data also reveal representations of how actors engage in a range of activities, which often are intellectual endeavors. Three themes emerge to describe the intellectual actions of the actors on the Home Page: the institution writ large (as mentioned above), the budding student scholar, and the esteemed and student-centered faculty member. An example from HU exemplifies the broad theme of intellectual endeavors ongoing at an institution: “Harvard University faculty, students, and staff strive to expand existing knowledge in the field of scientific inquiry, with some researchers garnering international recognition.” Representations on the RC Home Page best illustrate the latter two points about a student scholar and student-centered faculty member: “William Bruce ’11 connects with a 2000-year-old native culture by studying the artifacts he helped discover.” Sample data as an example of student-centered faculty at RC follows: “Through collaborative work, Professor Mary Miller guides students toward advanced, independent research not commonly available to undergraduates.” Such use of language

---

8 Retrieved from: http://www.princeton.edu 01/07/11
9 Retrieved from: http://www.ewu.edu 01/07/11
10 Retrieved from: http://www.harvard.edu 01/07/11
11 Retrieved from: http://www.rhodes.edu 01/07/11
12 Retrieved from: http://www.rhodes.edu 01/07/11
demonstrates a conscious effort to let the viewer know that RC faculty members work closely with students. Derivations with both specific and general references to student-centered faculty appear as well. An example of a specific reference appears as a caption to a primary image on the IU page: “Professor Dennis Peters brings passion for chemistry to teaching,”13 while an example of a general reference appears on the HSU page: “Professors who know you by name.”14

The text on the Home Page frequently provides access, in the form of hyperlinks, to other Web pages on the institutional website. Much of the language is very concise and appears in a word (e.g., Admissions, Academics, Athletics, Research) or two words with the use of an ampersand (e.g., Admission & Aid; Arts & Culture, Graduate & Professional, Majors & Programs; Financial Aid & Scholarships; Teaching & Learning). Slightly longer and more descriptive phrases also appear with the institutions referring to themselves in third person (e.g., Princeton establishes engineering collaborations with German universities).15 These phrases serve as the captions to images or, in many cases, hyperlinks to additional content on the topic. Writing in “headline style” invites the viewer to explore the content in more depth (Richardson, 2007).

Home Page Preliminary Analysis and Summary

The language on the Home Pages for the institutions in the sample exhibits promotional discourse by repeatedly touting the distinct accomplishments of current institutional actors (e.g., departments, faculty, students, teams) and the institutions as a whole. The prominence of institutional actors provides areas of distinction, which enhances the profile of the institution. Concurrently, such recognition provides tangible evidence that institutions can use to build identity (Slaughter & Rhoads, 2004; Toma et.

13 Retrieved from: http://www.iub.edu 01/07/11
14 Retrieved from: http://www.humboldt.edu 01/07/11
15 Retrieved from: http://www.princeton.edu 01/07/11
The text reveals the intellectual activities of its actors by frequently employing highly relational language to caption an image or headline. Relational discourse operates as a promotional technique that invites the viewer to easily picture oneself in the situation (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001). This sort of discourse aligns with the previous research on the marketing of higher education and CDA (e.g., Fairclough, 1993, 1995b; Slaughter & Rhodes; 2004). The literature states that institutions attempt to present an environment where students engage with the campus and meaningful academic activities under the close supervision of caring faculty (e.g., Hartley & Morphew, 2008), characteristics that set them apart from similar institutions. The use of short, descriptive phrases that link to other parts of the institutional website works to generate awareness or exposure to an element on the Web page (Krug, 2006; Lynch & Horton, 2009). Repetition of an institutional characteristic, such as the name of the college or university, and its accomplishments demonstrates an attempt to build brand identity (e.g., Anctil, 2008; Toma et al., 2005). In essence, the Home Page is the place where institutions repeatedly foreground the relevance of the institution by showcasing its distinctive and prestigious activities in the present state.

**About**

**Descriptive Analysis**

The About page contains self-promotional language extending the notions of prestige foregrounded on the institutions’ Home Pages. The language speaks to the traditions of the institutions and their decorated histories. The data contain numerous examples of past accolades functioning as tangible proof of institutional achievements in a number of fields. The institutions use prior achievements as capital that will serve as currency for its future graduates moving forward. The discourse underscores the institutions’ unique abilities to provide the education and skills necessary for their graduates to rise to positions of leadership or success in private fields.
The association of tradition often relates to age of the institution (i.e., founding year), size and beauty of the campus (i.e., acres, number of buildings), athletic affiliation (i.e., conference membership), and award-winning (e.g., Nobel, MacArthur, Pulitzer, Rhodes) and famous faculty members. For example IU states: “Indiana University Bloomington attracts students from around the globe who want the ideal college experience—great traditions, a gorgeous campus, international culture, Big Ten sports, and an active academic climate.”16 The institutions utilize these factors to communicate relevance internationally, nationally, regionally, and locally. For example, G1 and G2 institutions mention their status as a “world-leader” (UIUC) or “world’s leading research and teaching institutions” (SU), which are part and parcel to their “world-famous” traditions (IU). The institutions fail to specify or substantiate these claims on the “About” page. The G3 and G4 institutions promote their relevance on national and regional levels. For example, CC in G3 uses quotations from third-party publications to communicate relevance: “The Washington Post calls Centre ‘one of the premier intellectual gathering points in its region.’”17 Similar data exist in G4, “Eastern is a driving force for the culture, economy and vitality of the Inland Northwest region.”18

In order to focus on the future, institutions communicate how each prepares its graduates for leadership or success in career fields, or both. In each case, it is the institution that is the source of the success of the graduates, not the individual merits of the student. The examples below illustrate the point:

- UIUC – “We serve the state, the nation, and the world by creating knowledge, preparing students for lives of impact, and addressing critical societal needs through the transfer and application of knowledge.”19

---

16 Retrieved from: http://iub.edu/about/index.shtml 01/07/11
17 Retrieved from: http://centre.edu/about_centre/index.html 01/07/11
18 Retrieved from: http://www.ewu.edu/About.xml 01/07/11
19 Retrieved from: http://illinois.edu/about/about.html 01/07/11
• SU – “Stanford opened its doors in 1891, and more than a century later, it remains dedicated to finding solutions to the great challenges of the day and to preparing our students for leadership in today’s complex world.”

• RC – “Since 1848, we’ve aspired to graduate students who are passionate about learning, effecting change in their communities and the world, and exemplifying leadership and service with integrity.”

• EWU – “This has made Eastern an institution of opportunity for many college students seeking an education that will provide them the skills and practical training critical to succeed in today’s changing work environment.”

The institutions position themselves as the primary conduit for success, while also utilizing highly relational student-centered discourse. For example, IU states, “We nurture bright minds with an exceptional support network and breadth of programs.”

Similar representations appear in G2, “Harvard’s tradition of excellence has put generations of students at the center of the search for new ways of thinking.” BSC provides an example from G3: “We teach you how to think independently, to examine the arts and sciences aesthetically and critically, and to communicate clearly.”

And, lastly, from G4, “A focus on personal attention, faculty excellence and community collaboration allows Eastern to accomplish its mission for preparing well-rounded students ready to hit the ground running in their chosen career fields.” The discourse is seemingly student-centered discourse but the onus is not on the student, rather the institution. It is the institution that serves as the provider of intellectual development, leadership opportunities, and career preparation, not the individual qualities of the student.

---

20 Retrieved from: http://stanford.edu/about/ 01/07/11

21 Retrieved from: http://www.rhodes.edu/about/default.asp 01/07/11

22 Retrieved from: http://www.ewu.edu/About.xml 01/07/11

23 Retrieved from: http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/about/index.html 01/07/11

24 Retrieved from: http://www.ewu.edu/About.xml 01/07/11
About Page Preliminary Analysis and Summary

Each institution attempts to expand on the notion of prestige by focusing on the past and future. When discussing the past, institutions typically mention founding year; characteristics of its campus; esteemed past and current faculty; athletic conference membership; and relevance globally, nationally, or regionally. This type of self-promotional discourse is common in representations by colleges and universities (e.g., Anctil, 2008; Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 1993, 1995a; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Saichaie, 2010). The language works to establish the institutions’ records of accomplishments and how those records will serve the interests of its future graduates. The discourse then transitions to a discussion about how the institutions prepare their graduates for private ends. In the end, the discourse comes together to present a broad view of the continuum of distinct and relevant elements of the institutions’ histories. Such discourse functions as an indicator for the future prospects of the institutions and those who enter and exit their ranks. The focus on the private good associated with the outcome of higher education does not necessarily align with the goals of higher education (Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Labaree, 1997). In addition, the terms “leader” and “leadership” frequently appear, although explanations seldom accompany them (Urciuoli, 2003, 2009), thus opening a cause for uncertainty of the claims (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001; Janks 2005).

Admissions

Descriptive Analysis

Text on the Admissions pages speaks of agency through discourse constructed around the tent poles of choice, connections, opportunities, and personalization. Visuals also play a central role on the admissions sites in the sample (see Chapter 5 for a visual analysis). Institutions present a welcoming environment where countless options tantalize the viewer. The institution then functions as the primary channel to networks. While studying at UI a prospective student can “connect with career and internship
opportunities worldwide,” and UIUC invites prospective students to “Join the Illinois Network.” SU associates its networks with notions of prestige: “virtually unrivaled network of Nobel, Pulitzer and MacArthur-winning faculty and an especially talented student body from all 50 states and from around the world” and “Stanford is positioned in the heart of Silicon Valley just south of San Francisco and has served as an incubator for industry giants like Google, Yahoo, Netflix, the Gap and Charles Schwab.”

The Admissions pages utilize discourse that encompasses opportunities to make social connections as well. While at UI one will, “Discover the many ways to meet new friends and make a smooth transition to college.” IU simply states, “A packed social calendar” awaits prospective students. In addition, the institutions’ use of social networking sites (SNS) is another attempt to establish a relationship with the viewer and create a connection. Nine of the schools feature social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, YouTube) on their pages and employ language to actively promote the use of the sites. For example, UIUC uses a page on Facebook for prospective students and prominently features it through text on its Admissions page. IU offers a direct connection: “Skype with current international students.” CC states, “get social with Centre” and then presents numerous icons of SNS sites. Relational processes also include opportunities to connect with institutional employees. For example, IU states,

25 Retrieved from: http://admissions.illinois.edu/ 01/07/11
26 Retrieved from: http://admission.stanford.edu/ 01/07/11
27 Retrieved from: http://admission.stanford.edu/ 01/07/11
29 Retrieved from: http://admit.indiana.edu/ 01/07/11
30 Retrieved from: http://admit.indiana.edu/ 01/07/11
31 Retrieved from: http://www.centre.edu/admission/index.html 01/07/11
“Chat with students and staff” while UI designed an area where students can ask the “Virtual Advisor” a question. On the BSC site viewers can “Meet the Counselors.”

Personalization appears with topics ranging from residential life to close relationships with faculty to campus aesthetics: “Meet Rhodes students and hear what they love about their college experience…Talk to a professor about your major area of interest.” HSU states, “small class sizes taught by professors who’ll know your name,” and UIUC provides the viewer with the opportunity to “view campus from every angle.” In some cases, personalization turns into customization. The IU page offers a personalized video to “see what it’s like” (emphasis existing) for prospective students. For example, BSC states, “Tailor your experience. Sign up to be a VIP and customize your BSC Web experience.” One significant difference that appears with BSC is the domain of the BSC site changes from a “dot edu” (www.bsc.edu) to a “dot com” (www.gotobsc.com).

32 Retrieved from: http://admit.indiana.edu/ 01/07/11
33 Retrieved from: http://www.uiowa.edu/admissions/undergrad/first-year/index.html 01/07/11
34 Retrieved from: http://www.gotobsc.com/index.htm 01/07/11
35 Retrieved from: http://www.rhodes.edu/admissions/default.asp 01/07/11
36 Retrieved from: http://pine.humboldt.edu/admissions/ 01/07/11
37 Retrieved from: http://admissions.illinois.edu/ 01/07/11
38 Retrieved from: http://admit.indiana.edu/ 01/07/11
40 In an interview with BSC Director for Admissions, Jon Crook (personal communication, January 24, 2011), the decision to go with a dotcom domain came from a proposal from a third-party vendor located in Birmingham, Alabama. Crook said among the reasons for the switch was that the dotcom domain was more popular among students. BSC maintains similar content on its institutional site. However, the presentation of the content on the institutional site is much less subdued and does not have the promotional text and visual aesthetics as the dotcom site.
Institutions also attempt to address the issue of diversity on the Admissions page, yet rarely associate it with anything beyond geography or a innocuous statement. In the sample, SU and UIUC come the closest to providing clarity. SU states, “Take the time to learn more about why diversity at Stanford means more than geographic, racial, or ethnic differences,”41 while UIUC mentions racial categories (e.g., African-American, Native American) then simply presents the overall percentage of its freshman class that is non-white (27%). Typically nonspecific language appears; for example, SU states, “Today’s students come from all over the nation and the world to attend an extraordinary institution that combines many aspects of a small residential college with the resources of an unparelled research university.”42 SOU asks, “Looking for the Perfect University?” then states, “Southern Oregon University is an inclusive campus community dedicated to student success, intellectual growth, and responsible global citizenship.”43

Admissions Preliminary Analysis and Summary

The institutions use relational discourse to communicate choice, connections, opportunities, and personalization to the viewer. The following example from HU embodies the type of discourse in the data: “Today’s students come from all over the nation and the world to attend an extraordinary institution that combines many aspects of a small residential college with the resources of an unparalleled research university.”44

The discourse represents a welcoming atmosphere where the prospective students face a plethora of diverse options ranging from academic offerings to social opportunities to post-baccalaureate possibilities. Most of the institutions eschew the issue of diversity in the textual representations rather than provide a visual. Those that attempt to address

41 Retrieved from: http://admission.stanford.edu/ 01/07/11

42 Retrieved from: http://admissions.illinois.edu/ 01/07/11

43 Retrieved from: http://sou.edu/admissions/ 01/07/11

44 Retrieved from: http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/about/index.html 01/07/11
diversity offer cursory descriptions at best. This finding is consistent with existing research on academic marketing that posits representations of diversity are often vaguely represented (Urciuoli, 2003, 2009; Hartley & Morphew, 2008). The Admissions page contains multiple visuals and frequently links to additional content on SNS in an effort to provide a parallel relational platform. The Admissions page serves as a hub to admissions-related topics such as campus life, financial aid, and academic majors and programs.

**Academic Majors and Programs**

**Descriptive Analysis**

The emanating themes for the discourse on Academic Majors and Programs (AMP) pages are offerings, outcomes, support, and uncertainty. The institutions communicate a number of majors to choose from and the ability to create a major, should one of the dozens, if not, hundreds of options fail to suit the student. For example, UI states, “Undergraduate students can major, minor, and earn certificates in more than 100 subject areas.”45 Likewise, BSC states, “We currently offer five bachelor’s degrees in more than 50 programs of study. You can also pursue one of 11 interdisciplinary degrees and dual degree programs.”46 HSU offers a somewhat more complex representation: “In all, we offer 49 undergraduate majors, 84 undergraduate minor degrees, 82 options/concentrations, 12 graduate programs, 21 credential programs and several certificates of study.”47 Should the standard offerings not meet the desires of the student, the institutions support the customization of degree programs. For example, IU states, “Not sure what you want to study? Explore your options, or create a one-of-a-kind major through our Individualized Major Program.”48 HU simply states, “Each student’s

45 Retrieved from: [http://www.uiowa.edu/admissions/undergrad/majors/index.html](http://www.uiowa.edu/admissions/undergrad/majors/index.html) 01/07/11

46 Retrieved from: [http://www.gotobsc.com/academics/majmin.htm](http://www.gotobsc.com/academics/majmin.htm) 01/07/11

47 Retrieved from: [http://www.humboldt.edu/humboldt/programs](http://www.humboldt.edu/humboldt/programs) 01/07/11
program is individualized.”49 The details on the personalization do not appear on the AMP, rather on a separate Web page sometimes degrees of separation from the main AMP page.

The AMP page also focuses on the outcomes associated with the degree programs. Regarding the language on the G2 institutions, the message is not about degree completion, rather the personal, intellectual freedom permitted at the institution. For example, “The Stanford undergraduate program is designed to achieve balance between depth of knowledge acquired through specialization and breadth of knowledge gained through exploration.”50 PU states, “Candidates for the Bachelor of Arts explore areas of academic interest.”51 The discourse on G3 and G4 institutions focus on private benefits of higher education (e.g., placement at a prestigious graduate school, career). CC states, “You may also choose to complete a double major during your four years at Centre. Multiple majors make you more attractive to employers and increase career options for the future.”52 In G4, the EWU description of the programs relates to how it translates into a career or advanced degrees:

- Career: “As a graduate of the Health Services Administration Program, you will be prepared to work as a manager in the health care industry;”
- Postgraduate: “Counseling, Educational and Developmental Psychology offers undergraduate programs emphasizing preparation for careers in human services and education, where knowledge of development and exceptionality are central, as well as preparation for graduate study;”
- Career or postgraduate: “The Bachelor of Arts in Theatre, for those who wish to enter the profession or for those who wish to prepare for graduate school.” (Programs, 2011)

---

48 Retrieved from: http://admit.indiana.edu/academics/majors/index.shtml 01/07/11
49 Retrieved from: http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/about/learning/concentrations.html 01/07/11
50 Retrieved from: http://admission.stanford.edu/ 01/07/11
51 Retrieved from: http://www.princeton.edu/main/academics/undergraduate/ 01/07/11
52 Retrieved from: http://www.centre.edu/majors/index.html 01/07/11
The theme of support appears in the form of highly relational language. For example, at UIUC a viewer can “Get to know some Illinois professors before you come to campus.”\(^{53}\) Comparable constructions are common in G2, G3, and G4 as well. HU suggests, “Concentration courses offer many opportunities for close contact with faculty.”\(^{54}\) Similarly, SU states, “Around three-quarters of Stanford’s classes have fewer than 20 students.”\(^{55}\) Multiple instances of this type occur on the AMP page for HSU; in fact, an entire section appears with discourse of this nature and is titled, “Outstanding Faculty…Who’ll Actually Know Your Name.”\(^{56}\) The use of relational language is an attempt to create connection with the viewer and reduce the impersonality of associated with higher education, especially larger institutions.

Ultimately, the discourse representing a high degree of uncertainty appears on the AMP pages. For example, “Even if you are Still Deciding on a major, Iowa has the resources to help you define your future.”\(^{57}\) Furthermore, IU states, “Not sure what you want to study? Explore your options, or create a one-of-a-kind major through our Individualized Major Program.”\(^{58}\) Offertory language from PU states, “Students may choose a concentration from among 34 departments in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and engineering.”\(^{59}\) In addition, CC announces, “When it comes to majors, Centre offers real benefits. Since we encourage self-designed majors, your

\(^{53}\) Retrieved from: http://admissions.illinois.edu/academics/index.html 01/07/11

\(^{54}\) Retrieved from: http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/about/learning/concentrations.html 01/07/11

\(^{55}\) Retrieved from: http://www.stanford.edu/academics/ 01/07/11

\(^{56}\) Retrieved from: http://www.humboldt.edu/humboldt/programs 01/07/11

\(^{57}\) Retrieved from: http://www.uiowa.edu/admissions/undergrad/majors/index.html 01/07/11

\(^{58}\) Retrieved from: http://admit.indiana.edu/academics/majors/index.shtml 01/07/11

\(^{59}\) Retrieved from: http://www.princeton.edu/main/academics/undergraduate/ 01/07/11
choices are virtually unlimited." Such language opens degrees of uncertainty because the “real benefits” lack clarity. Pertaining to institutions in G4, HSU states, “Our diverse course offerings will give you the flexibility to explore your options and find the major that best fits your interests." On the EWU AMP page, the majority of the descriptions use discourse that is vague: “Our English degrees provide students with a strong background in critical analysis, the structure of language, and literary history before they begin specific career preparation in their selected programs.”

Academic Majors and Programs

Preliminary Analysis and Summary

The AMP pages feature text that presents students with a number of options to choose from when deciding on a concentration or major, even the freedom to create a major from scratch. Regardless of the student’s choice, the student will work in close contact with supportive faculty and take classes with around 20 students. The discourse ranges from preparation for a career, graduate studies, or intellectual development in general. The open-ended type of construction cuts both ways and opens up degrees of uncertainty. Depending on where the prospective student is in her college-choice process, the presentation of a number of options to a student may attract her to the institution. Conversely, the lack of specificity and sheer number of options may overwhelm, confuse and deter the student from further considering the institution (e.g., Hossler, 1999, Hossler, Schmit, Vesper, 1999, Poock & Lefond, 2001).

---

60 Retrieved from: http://www.centre.edu/majors/index.html 01/07/11

61 Retrieved from: http://www.humboldt.edu/humboldt/programs 01/07/11

62 Retrieved from: http://www.ewu.edu/Academics/Programs.xml 01/07/11
Financial Aid

Descriptive Analysis

All of the institutions use language that attempts to communicate two messages: (a) the cost of attendance is affordable and within the means of most prospective students and (b) the education one receives at the institution is of value. However, such discourse leads to uncertainty. With regard to the first point on affordability, both IU and UIUC offer the amount of dollars in aid awarded and percentage of students receiving aid whereas UI only mentions the percentage. This is interesting because UI states that around 90% receive financial aid, which is significantly more than IU (64%) and UIUC (77%) but does not mention what type of aid students receive. In addition, UI announces, “Iowa’s tuition and fees are among the lowest in the Big Ten,” but does not present specific information related to this claim. The G2 institutions use language that emphasizes “need-blind” admissions policy and a “need-based” financial aid policy. HU states, “Admission to Harvard is need-blind, by which we mean that financial need is not an impediment to admission,” then comments, “Financial aid at Harvard is entirely need-based.” The percentage of aid awarded is not present on the Financial Aid pages for the G2 institutions. BSC states, “We’re more affordable than you might think because we find creative ways to award financial aid to more than 95% of our students.” Pertaining to G3, RC states, “When thinking about the ‘price’ of college, it’s important to note that no student pays the full cost of a Rhodes education.” Interestingly, the G4 institutions do not present amounts or percentage of aid they typically award to students.

---

63 Retrieved from: http://www.uiowa.edu/admissions/undergrad/costs/index.html 01/07/11
64 Retrieved from: http://www.princeton.edu/admission/financialaid/ 01/07/11
65 Retrieved from: http://www.gotobsc.com/fa/index.htm 01/07/11
66 Retrieved from: http://www.rhodes.edu/finaid/default.asp 01/07/11
Institutions indicate “value” in terms of buying power both specifically and generally. Frequently, specific associations of value appear in conjunction with references to a third-party publication. For example, UI states, “We are one of the 45 ‘Best Buys’ in the country, according to the Fiske Guide to Colleges 2011.”67 BSC states, “Birmingham-Southern was again named a Best Buy for the quality of academic offerings in relation to the cost of attendance.”68 More general associations of the value focus on the notion of higher education as an investment. For example, SU states, “Meeting the cost of an undergraduate education is a significant investment.”69 BSC offers, “BSC represents an excellent value in today’s higher education marketplace.” Furthermore, BSC states, “Another thing to keep in mind is that the vast majority of our students graduate in four years, eliminating the cost required to stay for a fifth or even sixth year.” HSU utilizes the phrase, “invest in the future,”70 which appears as a caption to the primary image.

While the specifics of financial aid packages vary widely based on each student, the discourse on the Financial Aid pages does little to provide clarity, and uncertainty prevails. Only cursory information appears about the types of aid (e.g., grants, loans) and requirements to receive it. Uncertainty extends to actual and estimated tuition and costs as well. Only BSC and RC make specific claims and present actual tuition and costs or an estimation of tuition and costs on the Financial Aid pages in this sample. In G4, none of the institutions present information related to estimated costs or percentage of aid awarded on the pages in the sample. The pages primarily serve as a hub to financial aid

67 Retrieved from: http://www.uiowa.edu/admissions/undergrad/costs/index.html 01/07/11
68 Retrieved from: http://www.gotobsc.com/fa/index.htm 01/07/11
69 Retrieved from: http://www.gotobsc.com/fa/index.htm 01/07/11
70 Retrieved from: http://pine.humboldt.edu/finaid/ 01/07/11
forms, announcements of significant deadlines for scholarship applications, and links to other financial aid related topics (e.g., paying fees).

The language on the G2 pages is worth noting. HU discusses the “unusual financial challenges” higher income families may face. HU even gives an example: “Those parents with annual incomes of between $120,000 and $180,000 are asked to contribute an average ten percent of their income, with a declining percentage — from ten to zero — for parents with annual incomes between $120,000 and $60,000.”

Presenting information in this manner is different from any of the other two G2 institutions and much different from any other in the sample. Princeton focuses on its “Financial Aid Without Loans” program, declaring, “For more than three decades, we’ve considered students for admission to Princeton without concern over their families’ ability to pay — and offered aid to cover 100 percent of each admitted student’s need.”

This is somewhat contradictory because the following section states, “Since 2001, Princeton has been able to enroll growing numbers of students from low- and middle-income backgrounds with the grant aid they need to make our costs affordable.” This type of inconsistency creates confusion and uncertainty.

Financial Aid Preliminary Analysis and Summary

The Financial Aid pages use language to convey the affordability and value of higher education, yet few specifics appear to provide a clear picture of what that means in everyday language. The absence of this information communicates that the institutions may not want to readily disclose such figures (Fairclough, 1995a; Janks, 2005; Hartley & Morphew, 2008). The institutions also provide a number of hyperlinks related to financial aid on the Financial Aid page. While each student’s financial aid standing is different,

71 Retrieved from: http://www.stanford.edu/dept/finaid/undergrad/ 01/07/11

72 Retrieved from: http://www.princeton.edu/admission/financialaid/ 01/07/11

73 Retrieved from: http://www.princeton.edu/admission/financialaid/ 01/07/11
providing a number of additional options to decipher and navigate through is not conducive to a greater understanding of the information related to financial aid (Venegas, 2006). Given the recent research describing what students do not understand about the complexities surrounding the concept of financial aid (e.g., Avery & Hoxby, 2004; Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2009; Venegas, 2006), presentation of content in this manner is puzzling. Placement of this information on a separate page not only forces the user to click through to another page – sometimes two – it runs counter to literature on basic web design (e.g., Krug, 2006), research on web design (e.g., Mitra & Cohen, 1999), the preferences of prospective students (e.g., Poock & Lefond, 2001), and on commentary on both web design and college choice (e.g., Adelman, 2006; Hossler, 1999).

Student Life
Descriptive Analysis

The language that appears on the Student Life page overflows with discourse that emphasizes the “college experience” and the co-curricular offerings that are a part of that experience. Across the groups in the sample, each institution uses highly relational discourse to describe the boundless experiences awaiting prospective students. The language has a persuasive tone and promotes the features that make each institution the ideal college destination. Various adjectives describe the different flavors of student organizations, varsity and intramural athletics, coffeehouses, campus entertainment, Greek and resident life, and the diversity on campus.

The institutions address the “college experience” in general terms. For example, “You’ll quickly become part of the spirit and tradition of IU, an experience nearly two centuries in the making,”74 appears on IU’s student life page. UIUC plainly states, “Experience the excitement of Illinois,”75 leaving the viewer to decipher exactly what the

---

74 Retrieved from: http://admit.indiana.edu/life/index.shtml 01/07/11
75 Retrieved from: http://admissions.illinois.edu/campuslife/index.html 01/07/11
experience and excitement are. SU dedicates a section to housing and dining and under the “First-Year Experience” section. Other common representations juxtapose the academic and co-curricular; for example, CC states, “At Centre, learning isn’t just in the classroom, it’s a total experience.”

In an attempt to provide specificity on the college experience, the institutions discuss the availability of co-curricular activities. For example, UI states, “Choose from nearly 500 student organizations.” Similar constructions appear in G2, G3, and G4. Pertaining to G2, HU states, “Extracurricular opportunities at Harvard are virtually limitless with more than 400 official student organizations.” In G3, CC states students can “choose from more than 2,000 campus events a year — concerts, volunteer projects, sports, plays, parties, coffeehouses, movies, clubs, student government meetings, campus newspaper meetings, religious activities, and more.” The theme continues to G4 institutions. For example, “At Eastern you’ll find more than 100 active student clubs and organizations, Big Sky Conference athletics and a Greek system,” appears on EWU’s page.

Highly relational discourse features prominently on the Student Life page for all of the institutions. For example, PU states, “Getting involved in campus life is the quickest way to become a part of the University community, and to create one’s own Princeton experience.” Likewise, BSC states, “Life on the Hilltop is as varied and

77 Retrieved from: http://www.centre.edu/campus_life/ 01/07/11
79 Retrieved from: http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/about/beyond/index.html 01/07/11
80 Retrieved from: http://www.centre.edu/campus_life/ 01/07/11
81 Retrieved from: http://www.ewu.edu/Undergrad/Life.xml 01/07/11
82 Retrieved from: http://www.princeton.edu/main/campuslife/ 01/07/11
exciting as our student body—people like you who are always making new friends and sharing new experiences.”

The theme extends to G4 institutions as well: “Residential life at Southern Oregon University is an integral part of the SOU experience allowing you to create a home away from home where you are supported in your academic endeavors and encouraged in your co-curricular activities.”

The institutions also attempt to address “diversity,” though elaborations rarely appear. A breakdown of the findings by group follows. All the institutions in G1 use the Student Life page to mention cultural activities, though IU and UIUC give specifics (e.g., Celebrate Latino culture at the Festival Latino). However, none of the institutions uses “diversity” or “multicultural” on this page. Such terms frequently appear as strategically deployed shifters that serve as proxies for representations of ethnicity and race (Urciuoli, 2003).

In G2, SU directly addresses diversity on campus, while indirect mentions appear on the HU and PU pages, respectively. For example, SU states, “Among the many measures of diversity, more than 50% of Stanford students are students of color and 15% of freshmen are among the first in their families to attend college – making it among the most diverse colleges in America.” Other than (Southern Oregon University), SU is the only institution in the sample to mention first-generation students directly on any of the pages. An example of indirect representation of diversity appears in the PU data: “A vast range of cultural, educational, athletic and social activities are available to Princeton

---

83 Retrieved from: http://www.gotobsc.com/bsclife.htm 01/07/11

84 Retrieved from: http://sou.edu/students.shtml 01/07/11

85 Retrieved from http://admissions.illinois.edu/campuslife/index.html 01/07/11

students, faculty and staff.” Such language opens uncertainty about the attention the matter receives on campus.

G3 institutions represent diversity differently. RC is the only school that mentions multiculturalism: “Rhodes’ Multicultural Life program collaborates with student groups to sponsor events celebrating diversity in culture, ethnicity, religion and sexuality.” The term “multicultural” is strategically deployed to signify diversity generally (Urciuoli, 2003, 2009). BSC only mentions “cultural organizations” and “cultural heritage” while CC only provides a hyperlink to information about “Diversity at Centre.”

On the Student Life pages in G4, only SOU mentions the topic. SOU attempts to address diversity, but does not specify beyond a number of campus centers: “Student Centers including the Multicultural Resource Center, Commuter Resource Center, Queer Resource Center, and Women’s Resource Center highlight the rich diversity on campus while representing the values of our campus community.” Both EWU and HSU do not provide text related to diversity, multiculturalism, or the like on their Student Life pages.

Student Life Preliminary Analysis and Summary

Limitless co-curricular options confront the viewer and reveal that the institutions place equal if not greater importance on them compared to the academic aspects of higher education. Data from EWU appropriately summarizes the discourse on the student life page: “College isn’t just about academics – it’s about having the time of your life, building lifelong friendships and creating lasting memories.” The prospective students

---

87 Retrieved from: http://www.princeton.edu/main/campuslife/01/07/11

88 Retrieved from: http://www.rhodes.edu/campuslife/default.asp 01/07/11

89 Retrieved from: http://wwwcentre.edu/campus-life/ 01/07/11

90 Retrieved from: http://wwwcentre.edu/campus-life/ 01/07/11

91 Retrieved from: http://sou.edu/students.shtml 01/07/11

92 Retrieved from: http://www.ewu.edu/Admissions/Financial-Aid.xml 01/07/11
stand to benefit due to sheer number of activities, organizations, and outlets of personal development. Highly relational constructions provide further encouragement for the viewer to actively engage with the content and ultimately the institution upon arrival. The mention of diversity or multiculturalism simply means it exists at the institution. Cursory attempts to address and define the matter appear (Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Urciuoli, 2003, 2009). It is worth noting that visuals play a primary role in the construction of the institutional identity related to Student Life (see Chapter 5 for visual analysis).

Summary of Chapter 4

This chapter contained the findings of the textual representations on the websites of the 12 institutions in the sample. Organization of the findings appeared by Web page to better discuss the themes from the findings. The findings focused on the emergent themes from the data followed by several examples to illuminate the findings. Development of the themes was based on prior research on the marketing of higher education (see Chapter 2), relevant linguistic features from the literature on CDA (see Chapter 2), and common characteristics frequently appearing in the data for the study.

Preliminary analysis revealed the following themes for each page. The Home Page for the institutions focused on present events and served as the hub for information about the institution. It functioned as a billboard to announce its relevancy to the viewer. The events focused on recent prestigious awards and accolades achieved by institutional members (e.g., faculty, students, departments, athletic teams). The About pages expanded on notions of prestige by detailing the institutions’ long records of accomplishments and noteworthy achievements. The institutions used past kudos to position themselves as well-suited to address the future based on the significant endeavors ingrained in the tradition of the institutions. The language was very aspirant and self-promotional. The Admissions page utilized language to communicate the number of choices students have, the connections they can make, and awaiting opportunities post graduation. The institutions also offered a personalized admissions experience with discourse that spoke
of customized videos and web portals unique to each student. The Academic Majors and Programs (AMP) page continued the theme of personalization. Institutions presented an array of concentrations, majors, minors and programs of study. In addition, several institutions offered the student to tailor the program of study to her personal interests. The AMP page also contained a high degree of uncertainty. Students who desired to construct a program of study received little guidance on the topic and could see only a link to another Web page. This construction was similar for the pre-existing majors. In essence, the AMP page served as a portal to other pages detailing the specifics of the program itself. The theme of uncertainty carried over to the Financial Aid page. Few specifics appeared and institutions did not present an estimation of the cost of attendance; rather, the viewer had to navigate to another page to find more than cursory information. The institutions were similar in the fact they attempted to communicate to the viewer that attending the institution is affordable and of value. The value of the institution lies in not only its academic offerings, but also its co-curricular offerings and characteristics. Institutions used language that capitalized on this concept on their Student Life pages. The institutions promoted a number of activities and experiences available to the student body. The use of highly relational language appeared as the institutions attempted to include the viewer as a member of the campus, community, or institutional “family.”

The text that appeared on the six pages in the sample for each institution varied in subtle ways among the institutions within a certain group, yet retained similar overarching discourse. Chapter 5 contains a report on the visual findings of the study.
CHAPTER 5
VISUAL FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand how colleges and universities use language, whether textual or visual, to represent themselves to prospective students on their institutional websites. Organizations like colleges and universities seek to create and maintain a distinctive identity in an effort to build economic and social strength (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). A primary outlet for communicating institutional identity is on the Internet through institutional websites. This chapter will provide a detailed report of the ways colleges and universities in the sample used language, specifically the visual representations, on their institutional websites. The findings will focus on general descriptors and attributes of visual elements (e.g., actors, actions, location, setting), types of actors (e.g., white, non-white, female), and page design (e.g., layout, navigation, graphics, background, header/footer, spatial relationships). Organization of the findings revolves around six specific Web pages within the institutional websites:

1. College or University Home Page (e.g., www.collegeuniversityX.edu)
2. The “About” page that describes the institution (i.e., location, founding year, size of campus, academic reputation)
3. Admissions or Prospective Student(s) or Freshman or First-Year or Undergraduate page
4. Web pages describing academic majors and/or programs of study
5. Web pages describing financial aid, costs, or paying for higher education
6. Web pages describing student life, activities and/or organizations

Arrangement in this manner allows for a cohesive presentation on how institutions use language, the similarities and dissimilarities that occur among them, and the representation of social goods (e.g., class, gender, race, sexual orientation). A preliminary
analysis concludes each section\textsuperscript{93}. Reporting of the results stems from causes based on prior research about marketing of higher education (see Chapter 2), applicable visual features from the literature on visual analyses (see Chapter 2), and common characteristics and patterns frequently appearing in the data germane to the study. Table 3 describes the characteristics utilized to categorize the images on the websites in the sample. The areas align with previous visual analyses of academic marketing materials (e.g., Askehave, 2007; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Ramasubramanian et al., 2002).

\textbf{Table 3: Visual Categories/Themes Identified Among the Sample}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual Theme</th>
<th>Description of Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>Players on court, field, pool, rink; team uniforms present; sports statues near stadium, cheerleaders; fans cheering; stadium shots alone and of mostly fans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>Building as sole focus of image; marquee/signs on buildings, multiple buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Scenery</td>
<td>Trees, lawn, flowers, mountains, statues, signs on campus, snow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Activities and Interaction</td>
<td>Students in a classroom; faculty/older individual present (non-traditional college age) blackboard; lecture, students outside in circle with presence of instructor; sole image of instructor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commencement</td>
<td>Cap and/or gown; students and/or parents, posing for photos; professors cap and/or gown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab Work</td>
<td>Student or non-student in lab; safety glasses; lab coat; scientific equipment; high-tech equipment (e.g., solar panels, telescope)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts (e.g., art, music, theatre)</td>
<td>Playing instrument; on stage; painting; sculpting; drawing; singing; acting; costumes; artwork; museums; theatre stills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Life (Academic and Campus)</td>
<td>Co-curricular activities, students together, walking, biking, talking, exercising, reading (outside/inside, individually), studying, students cheering, intramural sports, books, study abroad, foreign location</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{93} Similar to Chapter 4, Chapter 5 contains an a-conceptual analysis of the data. Application of the conceptual framework appears in Chapter 6.
Review of the Sample

The following section presents brief review characteristics of the institutions in the sample. Within each group are similarities across admissions rate (percentage admitted), area (rural, suburban, urban), athletic conference membership, control (public or private), level (length of degree programs), location (geographic region), student type (student body type), and undergraduate enrollment (number of undergraduates). For more detail, please consult the Sample section in Chapter 3. Group One (G1) institutions are Indiana University-Bloomington (IU), the University of Iowa (UI), and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Group Two (G2) institutions are Harvard University (HU), Princeton University (PU), and Stanford University (SU). Note that SU is in neither the same geographic region nor the same athletic conference as HU and PU; however, SU shares many other characteristics (e.g., admissions rate, control). Group Three (G3) institutions are Birmingham-Southern College (BSC), Centre College (CC), and Rhodes College (RC). Group Four (G4) institutions are Eastern Washington University (EWU), Humboldt State University (HSU), and Southern Oregon University (SOU).

Home Page

General Descriptions

Visuals drive the Home Page and represent the current activities of the institution. Primary characteristics include multiple, rotating primary images; a series of navigational menus; and an abundance of hyperlinks. The images provide a snapshot of the institution as it stands in present day. To provide the viewer with an impression of the institution, the visuals represent both the “exterior” and “interior” hallmarks of college life. Representation of the exterior comes in the form of images showcasing impressive architecture (e.g., buildings) and vivid campus scenery (e.g., trees, mountains, quadrangles, statues). All of the images on the Home Page are well lit, whether shot indoors or outdoors. Seasonal changes figure into the images of campus scenery. At least
one institution in each group shows seasonal changes in images of campus scenery. Crisp fall colors and autumn leaves are a particular favorite. Falling, or freshly fallen, snow is another element appearing on the Home Pages in each of the groups. Some institutions even incorporate snow into the design of the page background (see Page Design section). Only one institution features a rainy day (UIUC) on the Home Page. Long shots of campus buildings and medium to close-up shots of actors appear on the Home Page. The long shot of a building often shows it standing apart from others around it, appearing as an icon against the horizon (see Figure 4). Placing the image of a building in a stark contrast to surrounding elements demonstrates the author’s desire to emphasize the uniqueness of the structure, thus allowing it to establish its own identity (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

To showcase what goes on inside the walls of the buildings on campus are scenes of lively classroom interaction (e.g., classroom discussion, students sitting in class) and meticulous lab work (e.g., interaction with scientific equipment). The images show individual and group actors in medium or close-up frames to provide a more intimate setting. This type of composition allows the viewer to see the face of the actor(s), thus making the scene more personal (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). See Figure 5 or Figure 9.
for a visual example of classroom interaction (Figure 5) and lab work (Figure 9) scenes found in the sample.

Types of Actors

Over 200 (n=201) unique primary images appear on the Home Pages for the institutions in the sample. White actors are the primary subjects of the primary images on the Home Pages in the sample. Non-white actors appear in 30 of the images (15%) of the images on the Home Pages in the sample (n = 30). Fifty-seven, or about 28%, of the images feature female actors. The following paragraph breaks the findings regarding the types of actors by group.

Figure 5: Princeton University Home Page

Source: Retrieved from www.princeton.edu/ 11/10/10

In G1, seven of the 40 primary images feature a non-white actor. Female actors are the focus in 11 of the 40 images in G1. Interestingly, female children appear in two of the 40 photographs on the G1 Home Pages. In G2, eight of the 61 images feature non-
white actors. Female actors appear in six of the 61 images for the G2 institutions. It is worth noting that 50 unique images come from HU alone. In G3, six of the 49 images feature non-white actors as the primary subject only. Thirteen of the 48 feature a female as the primary actor. However, RC features the lone, non-white female to appear in the 48 primary images on the Home Pages of G3 institutions. In G4, 12 of the 51 primary images feature non-white actors. Females appear in 27 of the 51 primary images, although of the 27, only five are non-white females. None of the pictures feature actors who appear depressed, distressed, or obese. Of the Native American actors to appear on the Home Pages, all three are featured in a primary image for a G4 institution. In each case, the portrayal of the actor (see Figures 6-8) is stereotypical of Native Americans (e.g., appears with face paint, native dress). Table 4 summarizes the findings on the types of actors appearing on the Home Page.

**Table 4: Types of Actors on Home Pages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Images</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>11 (28)</td>
<td>6 (10)</td>
<td>13 (27)</td>
<td>27 (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-white (%)</td>
<td>7 (18)</td>
<td>8 (13)</td>
<td>6 (12)</td>
<td>12 (34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Page Design**

Although the Home Pages differ in appearance, each retains a high level of similar features in terms of the placement and repetition of images and logos, news and current events, specific types of navigational menus, and use of colors. For example, large, primary images appear above the “fold.”

---

94 “Above the fold” is a common concept in the layout of newspaper design where an attention-getting headline or image (e.g., photograph) appears above the fold line of the publication. In the parlance of Web design, “above the fold” is akin to the same term where the headline or photograph appears on the screen in full view without the necessity of scrolling (Lynch & Horton, 2009).
appear within close proximity to the primary image. Typically, logos for the institutions appear in the upper left corner of the Home Page or in the page header (see Figure 5). Four of the institutions (HU, PU, RC, and EWU) also place the institution’s crest in the page header (Figure 5, above). Each institution features a “news” and “events” section placed below the “fold.” The “news” section highlights current student, staff, faculty, and institutional achievements, often placing a thumbnail, or small image, next to the announcement. In the case of a profile, often a headshot appears.

The “events” section features current happenings on campus (e.g., athletic competition, guest lecture, financial aid deadlines). G1, G3, and G4 institutions feature rotating primary visuals that change every 4 to 8 seconds. With the exception of PU, G2 institutions feature images that change only upon manual page cache. PU is the exception because it features a single primary image on the Home Page (Figure 5). PU does feature over 30 secondary images (see top left of Figure 5) that fall into all of the visual categories listed in Table 3.
The navigation menus feature admissions-oriented topics (e.g., Admissions, Financial Aid, Majors and Programs, Student Life) and audience (e.g., Alumni, Current Students) in close proximity to the primary image. All the institutions use both horizontal and vertical navigation menus that contain multiple hyperlinks to other destinations on the website (Figure 6). The background of the pages often appears in one of the school’s colors, if not both. For example, the IU page (Figure 9) appears wrapped in crimson (page background) and cream (the college gates).

Some differences occur within the groups in the sample. For example, both IU and UI feature dedicated audience navigation menus above the fold while UIUC audience navigation appears below the fold. In fact, UIUC has only one portal for prospective students. In G2, the page layout is similar for HU and PU. Both feature compact, fixed-width pages that do not require the viewer to scroll up or down. Ten of the institutions feature a variation of a vertical triptych (Figure 10) while PU and HU sites have a horizontal triptych; see Figure 11 (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). HU is unique among the other G2 institutions because it features a negative background (Figure 12), meaning the background is in black rather than white.

In addition, HU places an outline of its institutional seal on the page background as if to appear as a watermark (Figure 12). Also, the primary image space on the HU site occupies about two-thirds of the page space (Figure 12), by far the largest in the sample. Stanford also features an “expanded” menu just under its global navigation panel that contains a number of specific links to viewers of a particular audience (e.g., Undergraduate Admissions) or interested in a particular topic (e.g., Accelerator Laboratory).
Figure 7: Native American representation on the Humboldt State University Home Page

Source: Retrieved from http://humboldt.edu/ 11/10/10

Figure 8: Native American representation on the Southern Oregon University Home Page

Source: Retrieved from http://www.sou.edu 11/10/10
Figure 9: Indiana University Home Page

Source: Retrieved from http://www.iub.edu 11/10/10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Center</th>
<th>Right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Navigation Links</td>
<td>Primary Image &amp; Text</td>
<td>Secondary Navigation/Image</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10: Three-Column Vertical Triptych (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigation Menu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11: Three-Column Horizontal Triptych (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006)

In G4, EWU utilized two distinct site background images over the course of the data collection. The first featured a field with rolling hills, wild green grass, and a blue sky with white clouds and the second a wintry theme complete with snowflakes and snow-covered evergreen trees. This utilization gives the sense of the seasons at EWU. On the HSU page, the banner is, literally, an A-Z menu that permits users to search topics by letter of the alphabet (see Figure 7). This type of design is unique to the sample. Also, HSU’s Home Page features right hand navigation with a search box as a divider between admissions navigation subjects and audience navigation subjects.

![Figure 12: Harvard University Home Page](http://www.harvard.edu 1/7/11)

The SOU primary image rotates every 6 seconds and has a “countdown” icon that is featured in the top right corner of the primary image space (see Figure 8). This allows the viewer to know how long until the image rotates. This feature appears only on the SOU site. SOU may employ this type of feature for two reasons: the large numbers of images it rotates in the primary image space (n=30) or to prompt the viewer to select the
subject before the image changes. Last, during the second collection of data, SOU featured a snow animation on the Home Page that simulated snow falling on the Web page or the effect of a snow globe. This feature is unique to website design and is not explained by research even on basic web design (Krug, 2006; Lynch & Horton, 2009).

Preliminary Analysis and Summary

The institutions employed numerous large primary images that featured an array of “college” related scenes. The two most frequently occurring images on the Home Pages were campus scenery and classroom interaction. The second most occurring images were architecture and student life. The institutions emphasize present day activities, achievements, announcements, and events. To represent these actions, relevant images appeared featuring actors described by the text (e.g., “Professor Dennis Peters brings passion for chemistry to teaching,” Figure 9). White male actors were the primary subjects in the images, although females were featured in about one-third of the images. Non-white actors appeared in 15% of the images on the Home Page for the institutions in the sample. Given the mission of most institutions to increase diversity in their student body, such marginal representations of non-white actors were surprising. Of the images that did appear, many seemed to be caricatures of diversity (to be expanded in Chapters 6 and 7). To indicate the current season, institutions featured images showing weather-related seasonal changes on campus. The employment of logos and school colors represented an attempt to build institutional and brand identity (Anctil, 2008; Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004; Toma, et al., 2005). Images showed buildings at a distance to provide a distinct landmark while individual actors and groups appeared closer in a more personal composition. Image construction of this nature revealed the author’s desire for the viewer to establish a relationship with the image subject (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Superficial differences appeared in the page designs employed by the institutions. One reason for similar construction is to adhere to web usability standards (e.g., Krug, 2006;
Morville & Rosenfield, 2007). The extended analysis in Chapters 6 and 7 details additional reasons for the similar page designs.

## About

### General Descriptions

Minimal visuals appear on the About page for the institutions in the sample. Of the visuals that appear, a variety of themes emerge. The institutions deploy scenes of architecture, campus scenery, and student life images occur most often. For example, the G1 institutions’ About pages do not feature more than one visual element in the primary content area. IU utilizes an image of campus scenery on a picturesque, fall day showing students walking on a neatly-manicured, sun-drenched pathway (Figure 13). The SU page is the most unique in G2 and in the sample because of the number of images it employs and the number of themes depicted in the images (Figure 14). Images range from architecture to commencement to student life.

![Figure 13: Indiana University – Bloomington About Page](http://iub.edu/about/index.shtml)
Types of Actors

Of the 50 images that appear on the About page for the institutions in the sample, nine feature non-white actors (18%). Females appear in 17 of the 50 images (34%). However, variation exists within and between groups. In G1, only three total images appear. For example, all actors are white females in the banner image on the UI page (Figure 15). In G2, two of the seven images have female, non-white actors. For example, on both HU and PU sites, the images show Asian females (Figure 16). In G3, two of the 16 images feature non-white actors. Female actors are featured in three of the 16 images.

![Figure 14: Stanford University About Page](http://www.stanford.edu/about/ 1/7/11)

Table 5: Types of Actors on the About Pages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Images</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>1 (33)</td>
<td>4 (57)</td>
<td>3 (19)</td>
<td>8 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-white (%)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>2 (29)</td>
<td>2 (14)</td>
<td>5 (21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In G4, a total of 24 images appear. On the EWU page, four females appear (one African-American) all wear the same shirt (Figure 17). On the HSU page, four student testimonials rotate on manual cache of the page. The images feature three females (one Latina) and one African-American male. The images all show the actors engaged in an
activity related to a major. For example, an economics major appears dressed in a suit, interacting with another person holding a laptop; a journalism major appears in a radio studio; and an environmental engineering major takes readings on equipment. Table 5 summarizes the types of actors on the About pages in the sample.

Page Design

The design of the About page falls into three categories: highly consistent with the Home Page; completely different from the Home Page, but similar admissions-oriented pages (e.g., Financial Aid, Student Life); or highly inconsistent from the Home Page and the other pages examined in the sample (see Table 6). For example, the PU About page retains a high level of consistency with the Home Page and the rest of the PU website. Conversely, the HU page retains no consistency with the Home Page; in fact, the page stems from the Office of Admissions at HU (Figure 16).

![Eastern Washington University About Page Image](http://www.ewu.edu/About.xml)

**Figure 17: Eastern Washington University About Page Image**

Source: Retrieved from [http://www.ewu.edu/About.xml](http://www.ewu.edu/About.xml) 1/7/11

BSC displays a different design theme on the About than on the Home Page as well. In fact, the domain changes from “bsc.edu” to “gotobsc.com” (see Chapter 4 for detailed explanation). Noticeable differences include the light blue page background and location
of the navigation panel, which all relate to admissions content (e.g., Financial Aid, Majors). In G4, the page designs for the institutions fall into one of the three categories described in Table 5.

Table 6: About Page Design Consistencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highly Consistent with Home Page</th>
<th>Consistent Design to Admissions-Oriented pages</th>
<th>Highly Inconsistent with Home Page or Admissions-Oriented Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IU, PU, CC, RC, SOU</td>
<td>HU, SU, BSC, EWU</td>
<td>UI, UIUC, HSU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preliminary Analysis and Summary

Fewer visuals appeared on the About page than on any other pages in the sample. The focus of the content on the page was textual (see Chapter 4). Of the images that appeared, many were significantly smaller in size compared to other images on other pages on the websites. The images spanned a range of themes although primarily represented architecture, campus scenery, and student life, with no overriding theme among the sample. Non-white (18%) and female actors (34%) appeared in about the same proportion of images as on the Home Pages. About pages ranged in design that was highly consistent with the Home Page to highly inconsistent with the Home Page. The change in page design signified a change in topic whether subtly or overtly (Krug, 2006; Lynch & Horton, 2009).

Admissions

General Descriptions

The Admissions pages are highly visual and feature a wealth of content and a number of hyperlinks to other admissions-related topics (e.g., Academic Majors and Programs, Financial Aid, Student Life). The decided theme of the images on Admission pages reflects co-curricular aspects of student life. An array of activities is depicted in these images (i.e., dancing, rowing, laughing, playing in a rock band). Students appear
individually or in groups. In addition, icons appear with the logos of popular social networking sites (SNS) with text that encourages the viewer to investigate the institution’s presence on that site. The following section details some findings within the groups.

Each institution in G1 employs visuals and page design differently on its Admission page, although the types of images in use are similar. For example, UI uses numerous buttons on the page to link to SNS whereas UIUC opts to incorporate the SNS into the primary image on the page (Figure 18). The Admissions page for the institutions in G2 differ from the other pages on each institution’s respective site due to the amount of images present and the type of images in use. PU opts for an extremely large primary image that takes up well over 60% of the page. Four of the eight images that refresh on manual page cache feature fine arts (e.g., music, art, theatre), which is by far the most in this category for the institutions in G2.

![Figure 18: University of Illinois Admissions Page](http://admissions.illinois.edu/)
Placement of images constitutes the primary differences for the G3 institutions. The BSC Admissions pages feature a montage of images appearing at the top of the page. CC features one image, which is placed at the bottom of the page along with the logos of many SNS. RC uses a primary image in the center of the page. The amount and size of the images as well as the page design are the differences that surface for the G4 institutions. EWU uses a large primary image (Figure 19) complemented by graphics related to Admissions topics (i.e., a dollar sign and financial aid).

![Eastern Washington University Admissions Page Image](http://admissions.illinois.edu/)

**Figure 19: Eastern Washington University Admissions Page Image**

Source: Retrieved from [http://admissions.illinois.edu/](http://admissions.illinois.edu/) 1/7/11

The HSU page employs 11 rotating images that reload upon manual cache. The image takes up half of the page and the viewer of the page cannot avoid seeing the image due to its central location. The page design is completely different as well. Eight of the 11 images feature students in a classroom or lab setting on the HSU Admissions page. This type of representation is consistent with much of the discourse on the site that mentions the research and scientific aspects of class at HSU. SOU uses a series of smaller images that appear on the right side of the page. The images are testimonials from four students and rotate when the page is cached manually.
Types of Actors

Of the 122 images that appear on the Admissions pages in the sample, 37 show non-white actors (30%). The amount and percentage are the same for females as well (n=37). Table 7 summarizes the types of actors on the Admissions pages in the sample.

In G1, IU has all but one of the six primary images featuring white actors as the primary image subject. Three of the six images feature females as the primary subject in the image on the IU Admissions page. Of the two images on the UI Admissions page, white males appear in both of them. On the UIUC page, non-white actors appear in one of the primary images. In G2, HU features headshots of its six student bloggers. Of the bloggers, the three males are non-white while all of the females are white. HU also has 15 automatically rotating primary images, of which six feature non-white actors. For the PU data, non-white subjects appear in four of the eight images. Females feature as the primary subject in half of the images that appear. The SU page has 47 images that rotate on the Admissions page. Thirteen are non-white (28%). Nine of the 47 images feature female actors (19%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Images</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>5 (33)</td>
<td>17 (23)</td>
<td>6 (50)</td>
<td>4 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-white (%)</td>
<td>7 (47)</td>
<td>22 (30)</td>
<td>3 (25)</td>
<td>5 (23)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In G3, BSC has two of its seven primary images showing non-white actors. Three of the seven show female actors on the BSC page. Only one image appears on the CC Admissions page, and it features two white female actors. During the second round of collection, the RC page thumbnails four Rhodes students. Two are female (one is
African-American) and two are white males. In G4, the EWU page’s primary image (Figure 19) is a medium shot of a non-white male (white shirt, backpack). On the HSU site, only two of the 11 images feature non-white actors. For SOU, the images feature two white females, one African-American male, and one Latino male.

Page Design

As previously noted in the About section, many of the institutions use an entirely different page design on the Admissions page. The pages have a more casual tone and feature numerous graphical elements (e.g., shapes, drawings, arrows, colors, background). With the exception of HSU, all of the institutions fill the Admissions page with content.

For example, IU uses six primary images in the center content area. Viewers can manually scroll through the six images. Accompanying each image is a red banner that says, “College should be like this,” and in the corner of the banner is a smaller clock tower image along with a red pennant that says “Indiana” on it. An orange circle appears and provides subtext for the photo. The subtext is designed to complement the image (e.g., Your ticket to the world). Figure 20 provides a visual. Similarly, UIUC completely fills the page with content (e.g., photographs, graphical, textual, and icons). The primary image is cast in bright orange and is located at the top center of the page. The panels below the primary image feature thumbnails and include text that incorporates a social networking site’s (SNS) logo as well (Figure 18). For example, there are three photos (framed in a white rectangle) on the right side of the space, and all feature campus buildings (one is an aerial shot of the campus) and the logo of Flickr (a photo sharing, social networking site).

The primary content area has panels for organizational purposes. Secondary images appear in the top left of center navigation column and rotate upon manual cache of the page. Ten images appear with the “more photos” stripe across the top left corner of the image. The “Illinois Profile” and “Rankings” appear in the left side bar and state
“facts” about the institution. Student and admission staff blog posts occupy the right column of the page and headshot thumbnails appear next to each blogger’s entry.

In G2, the institutions use large images and provide video content. Strangely, the HU site features automatically rotating images on the Admissions page but not on the Home Page. The size of the image on the PU Admissions page consumes more than 60% of the page. SU provides video content and a number of images depicting student life activities (n=13) and architecture (n=12).

Figure 20: Indiana University Admissions Page Image
Source: Retrieved from http://admit.indiana.edu/ 1/7/11

In G3, CC places its primary image on the right column of its Admissions page. The first image is a large “Request Info” panel that has white text on a red background. Below that is a panel that contains sketched icons for social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, RSS, Twitter, Zinch, Flickr, YouTube). It is the only institution in G3 and in the sample to feature a link to Zinch. RC employed different primary images over the two collection periods; however, both were large thumbnails for a video. During the first round of data collection the thumbnail showed maroon arrows pointing at Rhodes College on a map. A scrap of paper with the word “Tour” (in brown) appears to be paper
clipped to the page (Figure 21). The background of the image is a map that shows part of the word “Memphis.” During the second round of collection the thumbnail featured four bust (head and shoulder) shots of four Rhodes students.

In G4, the theme of the page is also less formal and appears to represent a page from a notebook of a student. The background has spiral notebook fringes on the left side and contains drawings and cursive handwriting. In addition, a page on a map appears and shows where EWU is located. Visual icons appear next to topics pertaining to prospective students. For example, the “Admitted Students” link has a “thumbs up” icon next to it and the “Costs & Fees” shows a dollar sign (Figure 19). The images also appear to be hand-drawn in pencil or pen further communicating the casual feel of the page. The page design is also very different from the rest of the HSU website. The background image appears to represent a tribal graphic (Figure 15). This representation is consistent with the repeated appearance of the “Tribal Communities” link that shows on each page in the HSU sample except for this one. SOU places a banner at the top of the page composed of 15 different thumbnail images that vary in size.

Figure 21: Rhodes College Admissions Page Image

Source: Retrieved from http://www.rhodes.edu/about/default.asp 1/7/11
Preliminary Analysis and Summary

The Admissions pages were highly visual and showcased an assortment of student life-related activities. Many of the actors appeared with other actors and seemed to be enjoying themselves (e.g., cheering, dancing, laughing, smiling). Few images showed students studying. Such construction underpins the relational discourse promoted in the text on the pages and shows that college is a place to have fun and meet others (Askehave, 2007; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Poock & Lefond, 2001; Saichaie, 2010). Non-white and female actors were the subjects of 30% of the images appearing on the Admissions page. The page design featured ample content and served as a hub to other admissions themed topics (e.g., Financial Aid, Residence Life). The pages had multimedia content and links to popular SNS, with some institutions placing extra emphasis on those pages (UIUC, HU, CC, EWU). One occurrence in the data epitomized the types of images on the Admissions pages. The BSC used an animated montage sequence lasting 15 seconds as 12 photos showed pictures of study abroad, classroom interaction, student life, athletics, a religious official, and finally a woman smiling in cap and gown. In essence, the montage displayed snapshots of the “college experience.”

Academic Majors and Programs

General Descriptions

The Academic Majors and Programs (AMP) pages for the institutions use minimal images and an abundance of hyperlinks. The limited images that appear in the data typically depict actors engaged in seemingly scholarly activities (e.g., reading) or working in a lab with scientific equipment (Figure 22).

Types of Actors

Of the actors to appear on the AMP pages, eight of the 23 (35%) are non-white. Similarly, eight of the 23 actors are female (35%). In G1, one of the three subjects is non-white while two of the three actors are female. In G2, five of the 14 actors are non-white. Five of the 14 images feature female actors. In G3, one of the four actors is non-white; a
female actor is represented in one of the four images as well. In G4, one of the two images features a non-white actor, and no females are the subjects of the images on the AMP pages for G4 institutions. Table 8 summarizes the types of actors on the AMP pages in the sample.

Table 8: Types of Actors on the AMP Pages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Images</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>2 (67)</td>
<td>5 (36)</td>
<td>1 (24)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-white (%)</td>
<td>1 (33)</td>
<td>5 (36)</td>
<td>1 (24)</td>
<td>1 (50)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Page Design

The AMP pages fall into the following categories: a listing of the academic majors and programs, an overview of the academic merits of the institution and/or the listings of the majors, and a discussion of the academic merits of the institution (Table 9).

Table 9: Themes for Academic Majors and Programs Pages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A listing of the academic majors and programs</th>
<th>A discussion of the academic merits of the institution</th>
<th>An overview of the academic merits of the institution and the listings of the majors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSC, CC, EWU, SOU, UI</td>
<td>HSU, RC, SU, UIUC</td>
<td>IU, HU, PU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The images in use appear at the top of the page. Those that only list the majors and programs available simply provide a list of hyperlinks. For example, UI has the entire list of offerings on one page. Of institutions that discuss the merits of the institution, the content varies. For example, UIUC’s AMP page has a primary content area with two columns that feature a heading and subtext that directs viewers to topics beyond areas of
study. For example, a heading on the page is for “Academic Prestige.” For institutions in the second category, a brief introductory paragraph provides an overview of the majors and programs, then a series of hyperlinks appear typically in separate columns.

![Figure 22: Harvard University AMP Primary Image](http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/about/learning/concentrations.html)

**Figure 22: Harvard University AMP Primary Image**

Source: Retrieved from http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/about/learning/concentrations.html 1/7/11

**Preliminary Analysis and Summary**

A reduced number of images appeared on the AMP pages for the institutions in the sample compared to the rest of the pages in the sample. The arrangement of content appeared in three forms: a listing of the academic majors and programs; an explanation of the academic merits of the degree programs; or an explanation of the academic merits of the institution and a listing of majors and programs. Non-white actors appeared in 35% of the images. The same percentage was true for female actors featured on the AMP pages. A copious number of hyperlinks populated the AMP pages to take the viewer to more detailed information about specific programs or other areas of the website.

**Financial Aid**

**General Descriptions**

Institutions use visuals and page design to directly and indirectly acknowledge the topic of financial aid on the Financial Aid pages. Direct references include a table
containing estimated costs and a seal from third-party publications describing the value of
the institution. Indirect references include the use of secondary images associated with
money and page design elements (e.g., calculator, green page background) to suggest the
topic of financial aid (see Page Design section). Most of the institutions feature visuals
unrelated to the financial aid directly or indirectly and show images related to campus
scenery.

With regard to direct references, RC is one of the two institutions in the sample
(BSC is the other) to feature a table with a breakdown of estimated costs on its Financial
Aid page (Figure 23). The RC page also features an indirect reference related to financial
aid on its page. A secondary image shows an extreme close up of the face of a white
piggybank and scattered coins beneath it (Figure 23).

![Figure 23: Rhodes College Financial Aid Page](http://www.rhodes.edu/finaid/default.asp)
The SOU data also reveal direct references. The SOU Financial Aid page banner (Figure 24) has seven thumbnail images. The images show financial aid staff working directly with students at computers. This type of interactivity is not present on the Financial Aid pages of the other institutions in G4, or in the rest of the sample. Much of the text on the Financial Aid pages contains relational text; however, SOU is the only institution to represent relational discourse visually.

Figure 24: Southern Oregon University Financial Aid Page Banner Images
Source: Retrieved from http://sou.edu/enrollment/financial-aid/ 1/7/11

Many institutions mention their placement in a third-party publication in text, yet UI is the only one to depict it visually. UI displays a seal from the *Fiske Guide to Colleges 2011* (Figure 25). The Fiske seal appears at the top of the page in an attempt to indicate that school is a “best buy.” The text and visual are complementary and cohesive (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Figure 25: Fiske Seal on the UI Financial Aid Page
Source: Retrieved from http://www.uiowa.edu/admissions/undergrad/costs/index.html 1/7/11
Types of Actors

White actors appear in the vast majority of the images on the Financial Aid pages in the sample. Five of the 27 actors on the Financial Aid pages (19%) are non-white. Female actors appear in 10 of the 27 images (37%). SOU’s utilization is perhaps the most interesting in the sample. The banner image shows what appears to be financial aid staff working with students in the financial aid office (Figure 24). The actors in the image appear to represent racially diverse individuals, and the image is one of two in the sample to feature non-whites on the Financial Aid page (RC is the other). Table 10 summarizes the types of actors on the Admissions pages in the sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Images</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>2 (50)</td>
<td>2 (25)</td>
<td>3 (50)</td>
<td>3 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-white (%)</td>
<td>1 (25)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1 (17)</td>
<td>3 (33)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Page Design

The design of the Financial Aid pages varies within and between the groups; however, UIUC, PU, and HSU differ the most from the other pages in the sample. For example, the UIUC page directs viewers to a different website: Office of Student Financial Aid (OSFA). Both PU (Figure 26) and HSU (Figure 27) change the page background to shades of green. This change is a subtle acknowledgement to the topic of financial aid. In addition, the PU page has a graphic of a calculator.

Preliminary Analysis and Summary

Of the institutions that chose to address financial aid with visual representations, both overt and subtle references appeared. Direct references included showing staff assisting students, displaying the estimated costs, and the logos of third-party publications related to financial aid. Indirect references included changing the
background of the page and images associated with financial aid. Generic images unrelated to financial aid appeared on most of the Financial Aid pages in the sample. Page design features often required the viewer to navigate away from the page to text that directly presented the cost of tuition and amount of financial aid.

Figure 26: Princeton University Financial Aid Page

Source: Retrieved from http://www.princeton.edu/admission/financialaid/ 1/7/11

Figure 27: Humboldt State University Financial Aid Page

Source: Retrieved from http://pine.humboldt.edu/finaid/ 1/7/11
Student Life

General Descriptions

Not surprisingly, images of student life appear on the Student Life pages. The images reflect an array of co-curricular activities (e.g., riding a bicycle, participating in athletics, talking to peers, playing a guitar outdoors) by actors who all appear to be of college-going age. Much like the images on the Home Page, the activities take place outdoors, under sunny skies, and the actors often appear in the company of others. As previously mentioned, none of the actors appears depressed, distressed, obese, or unkempt. Frequently, the actors appear dressed in clothing that displays the school’s colors or name (Figure 28).

Figure 28: Centre College Student Life Page Primary Images

Source: Retrieved from http://www.centre.edu/campus_life/ 1/7/11

Types of Actors

Thirty images appear on the Student Life pages in the sample. Nine of the 30 images have non-white actors (30%). Nearly 57% of the images feature female actors (n=17). In G1, two of the six images feature non-white actors and four of which show female actors. For example, the IU primary image shows an African-American female
sitting on the back of a black car wearing a black shirt that says “Represent” in white letters, light blue jeans, and red beads. She holds a gold party favor (kazoo) in her left hand and appears to be snapping with her right hand. The scene appears to be set at a parade during the fall season as a crowd of students (namely the IU Marching Band) appears in the background and watches, although they appear in soft focus.

Figure 29: Indiana University Primary Image


In G2, the SU page contains the most diverse set of actors. For example, the primary image on the left side of the screen shows five females (one African-American) walking to a sporting event. All wear school colors, and two have matching shirts that say “The Red Zone” on the front. In addition, an image appears of two Latina students next to the heading that leads viewers to information about “Diversity at Stanford” (Figure 30). In G3, one of the 10 images has non-white actors. It appears on the banner image on the RC page and shows three females (two are African-American) and one white male. The RC has only one primary image. In G4, only three images appear on the Student Life pages.
The banner image on the EWU is a collage of small photographs and has both non-white and female actors. Table 11 summarizes the types of actors on the Admissions pages in the sample.

**Table 11: Types of Actors on Student Life Pages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>G1</th>
<th>G2</th>
<th>G3</th>
<th>G4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Images</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>4 (67)</td>
<td>6 (55)</td>
<td>6 (60)</td>
<td>1 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-white (%)</td>
<td>2 (33)</td>
<td>5 (45)</td>
<td>1 (10)</td>
<td>1 (33)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Student Perspective

**INTRODUCTION**

Stanford students come from all 50 states and more than 60 countries to live on a breathtaking campus that is remarkably residential. More than 60% of Stanford undergraduates live on campus all four years.


**Figure 30: Stanford University Student Life Page Excerpt**

The Student Life pages retain design consistency with the Admissions pages for the institutions. The Student Life pages serve as the hyperlink hub to other information.
about student life (e.g., housing, dining services, student clubs and organizations, cultural centers).

Preliminary Analysis and Summary

The Student Life pages displayed images related to student life themes. The images frequently featured co-curricular scenes set outdoors under sunny skies. The institutions also attempted to visually represent diversity on the campus by showing underrepresented actors. Typically, the image appeared next to a heading related to “culture” or “diversity.” About one-quarter of the images featured non-white actors, and female actors appear in over 50% of the images. A moderate number of visuals appeared on the page as the primary purpose of the Student Life page is to provide a snapshot of some of the available activities at the institution and then provide access to more content about them. Consequently, a number of hyperlinks appeared for topics related to aspects of campus life (e.g., athletics, diversity, student organizations and clubs, religious offerings, residence halls).

Conclusion

This chapter contained the findings of the visual representations on the websites of the 12 institutions in the sample. Organization of the findings appeared by Web page to allow for a cohesive discussion of the relevant findings. A preliminary analysis revealed the following themes for each page. Before proceeding, it is worth noting that white males were the primary actors in the overwhelmingly majority of images on all of the pages, with the exception of the Student Life page, where female actors appeared in nearly 60% of the images.

Visuals drove the Home Pages and represented the current activities of the institutions. Primary characteristics included numerous, changing primary images; several navigational menus; and multiple hyperlinks. Limited visuals appeared on the About page as the text was the focus of the content. The consistency of the page design varied within the sample. Some institutions’ About pages preserved a high level of
consistency with the Home Pages whereas some changed completely. The Admissions pages contained an abundant of visuals depicting the co-curricular aspects of “college life.” The page design also differed and served as a template for other pages with admissions-related topics (e.g., Academic Majors, Student Life). The Academic Majors and Programs pages varied in the type and amount of content presented. Some of the institutions simply listed their majors and programs while others used the page to extol the virtues of their academic reputation. The Financial Aid pages featured images directly or indirectly associated with the topic. Direct associations with financial aid included a table of the costs of tuition while indirect associations included changing the background color of the page to green or featuring an icon of a calculator. The Student Life pages utilized images to showcase the student life atmosphere on the campuses for the institutions in the sample. The actors engaged in a number of co-curricular activities (e.g., attending athletic events, talking in small groups, riding bicycles, etc.). The Student Life pages served as a portal for hyperlinks to other topics specifically related to student life (e.g., dining, residence halls). In addition, the institutions attempted to address the matter of diversity on the Student Life pages by showing images of members of underrepresented populations. Often the images appeared next to text that mentioned “culture” or “diversity.” Data revealed that non-white male actors appeared in 16% of the images and non-white female actors appeared in 13% of the images on the Student Life pages.

The visuals that appeared on the six Web pages included in the sample for each institution varied in subtle ways among the institutions within a certain group. Moreover, the visual comparisons between the groups yielded understated, yet significant similarities and differences. Chapter 6 details the application of process and societal analysis dimensions of Fairclough’s framework, both textually and visually, for the sample data.
CHAPTER 6

PROCESS AND SOCIETAL ANALYSIS

Chapter 6 contains the application of process and societal analysis dimensions of Fairclough’s framework. These dimensions permit the researcher to make interpretations and explanations based on the findings of the study and offer a larger analysis of the findings viewed through the lens of CDA. Chapter 6 has four parts. First, the chapter opens with a review of Fairclough’s conceptual framework (1993, 1995a, 2001). Part two contains a discussion of the interpretive framework within the process dimension of Fairclough’s conceptual framework. Part three contains the application of interpretative framework with examples from the data. Part four contains the societal analyses of the data. In a slight shift of gears, the presentation of textual and visual data appears together unless specifically mentioned. Presentation in this manner allows the researcher to demonstrate how the properties of language function to contribute to the formation of social identities and practices. This is consistent with previous research using CDA to examine academic marketing materials (Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 1993; 1995a; Saichaie, 2010).

Underlying this analysis is the position that institutions increasingly and purposefully utilize language for promotional purposes to create a unique identity and to make themselves distinctive from competitors (Urciuoli, 2003, 2009). The language that appears on institutional websites reflects the efforts of several institutional actors and, increasingly, third-party enterprises such as consulting firms (Adelman, 2006; Fairclough, 2001; Hossler, 1999). Given this reality, it is reasonable to assume institutions might utilize a variety of tactics to create promotional messages. Furthermore, private sector tactics that rely on the ploys of advertising and marketing for institutions designed for the advancement of public goods conflate the purpose of higher education institutions (Bok, 2003; Boyles, 2007; Gumport, 2000; Hartley & Morphew, 2008). CDA
lends itself as an approach to examine and understand this relationship and, in turn, how it affects social institutions and access to them (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001).

Review of Fairclough’s Framework

Fairclough’s (1993, 1995a, 2001) conceptual framework (Figure 3) has three dimensions of discourse analysis, whereby each dimension includes a distinctive type of inquiry: textual (descriptive), process (interpretative), and societal (explanative). The first dimension of Fairclough’s approach to CDA is textual analysis in which the researcher focuses on the texts and visuals as the objects of analysis (Chapters 4 and 5). The intent of analysis at this level is to describe the properties of the textual and visual representations. For textual data, analyses may focus on descriptors (e.g., selection of wordings, sentence construction, length), use of verbs (e.g., existential, material, relational), voice (e.g., active, passive), modality (e.g., possibility, uncertainty), and sequencing of information and so forth (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001; Halliday, 1985, 1994). For visual data, analyses at the descriptive level involve examining general attributes (e.g., actions of actors, location, setting), types of actors (e.g., white, non-white, female, athletes), image composition (e.g., angles, colors, focus, framing, vectors), and page design (e.g., layout, navigation, graphics, background, header/footer, spatial relationships) and so forth (Hall, 1997; Hodge & Kress, 1989; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The goal at this level of analysis is to ascertain the formal properties of the data (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001).

The second dimension is process analysis, which involves interpretive analysis (Chapter 6). The goal is to unpack the message and look at its functional parts to understand and interpret the relationship between the data and its producers (Fairclough, 2001). In process analysis, the researcher focuses on the interactions among the various aspects of the production (e.g., design), distribution (e.g., World Wide Web), and consumption (e.g., listening, reading, viewing). Analysts then make interpretations based on the relationships evident in the message and identify what discourse practices speak to
larger societal structures (Fairclough, 2001). When analysts operate at the process level, they enact an interpretive framework by systematically determining the dimensions of the content situated in the data (Fairclough 1993, 1995a, 2001). At the process level, the analyst uses the (a) contents of the language, (b) its subjects, (c) the relationship of the subjects, and (d) the connections between the role of language and the greater social structures it reflects and supports. Table 12 provides a breakdown of the interpretive framework within the process level of analysis.

**Table 12: Fairclough’s Interpretive Analysis Framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Relations</th>
<th>Connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What’s Going On?</td>
<td>Who’s Involved?</td>
<td>In What Relations?</td>
<td>What’s the Role of Language in What’s Going On?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities, Topics &amp; Purpose (e.g., verbs, modalities, voice)</td>
<td>Subjects (e.g., institutions, actors, buildings) &amp; Types (e.g., white, non-white, female, male)</td>
<td>Composition (e.g., angle, distance) &amp; Sequence (e.g., top, bottom, center)</td>
<td>Themes &amp; Genres that connect to larger social structures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The third dimension of analysis is at the societal level, which appears at the end of Chapter 6. Societal analysis focuses on *explanations* of larger cultural, historical, and social discourses surrounding interpretations of the data. The goal of CDA is to provide the means to examine everyday language in an effort to raise awareness about issues of equality and struggles for power such as access to education (e.g., Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001; Gee, 2005; Luke 1996; Rogers, 2004; Woodside-Jiron, 2004). By moving through this framework, analysts can use micro-level linguistic analyses to inform larger macro-level discourses. Inevitably, there is overlap between the levels as the researcher attempts to identify the features, patterns, and structures of discourse types (e.g., the discourse of higher education marketing). The formation of discourse types leads to the construction of genres or themes that serve as overarching units of analysis at the societal
level. However, before arriving at societal level conclusions, a researcher employing Fairclough’s method of CDA analyzes data at the interpretative level.

**Fairclough’s Interpretative Analysis Framework**

This section describes the interpretative analysis framework within the process level of analysis. The interpretative analysis framework contains four interconnected aspects the analyst uses to make interpretations of the data: (a) contents of the language, (b) its subjects, (c) the relationship of the subjects, and (d) the connections between the role of language and the greater social structures it reflects and supports (Table 6). The following subsections provide a description of interpretative aspects along with examples from the sample to demonstrate the utility of Fairclough’s method at this level of analysis.

**Contents of the Language**

The contents of language involve examination of the purpose of the message in an effort to answer the basic question: “what’s going on?” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 122). Certain activities serve certain topics, which together form the purpose of a message. Components of language (e.g., verbs, modality, voice) assist the analyst with interpretation (Halliday, 1985, 1994; Fairclough, 1993, 1995, 2001). Social practices dictate the type of activities associated with social institutions and how representations appear in language (Fairclough, 2001). For example, on a Web page discussing student life, one expects to see scenes of students laughing and talking and text describing co-curricular aspects of college life. In this scenario, the “what’s going on” is the producer’s intent to show the interaction of the students on the campus and demonstrate a level of social relationships.

**Subjects**

Another dimension of the interpretative framework includes analysis of the subjects of the message. The purpose at this level is to answer the following question: “who’s involved?” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 122). Typically, message producers employ
types of actors for specific purposes. Fairclough (2001) stated, “The institution ascribes social identities to the subjects who function within it” (p. 123). For example, admissions and recruiting offices show Nobel winning faculty as a way to distinguish the institution and communicate and promote a level of prestige.

Relations

Closely associated to subjects are relations. At this stage, subject positions, respective to each other or individually, provide insight into power and social relations enacted in the message. Research demonstrates that colleges and universities increasingly rely on relational discourse to communicate a welcoming environment (Adelman, 2006; Anctil 2008; Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 2001). For example, if the institution states that its faculty works closely with students and presents an image of a student and faculty member working together, it is an attempt to demonstrate this relationship. Representations of this nature communicate a collaborative environment where the participants have equal stake in the outcome of the activity (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Utilization of such images is designed to show a shift of power from a traditional holder of power (the faculty member, by proxy the institution) to a more balanced or shared sense of power (Fairclough, 1995a; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Hodge & Kress, 1989).

Connections

Connections are the final stage of the interpretive framework. It encompasses the previous three stages and allows the researcher to associate the data with larger societal matters (i.e., Societal Analysis). Essentially, connections involve the manner that texts appear in situational contexts and how they speak to larger discourse genres. Representations of a faculty member and student working in close collaboration signify an attempt to dissociate notions of rigidity and impersonality traditionally associated with higher education and, quite literally in this case, show the close connections of the institutional actors. Furthermore, as preliminary analysis from Chapters 4 and 5
demonstrated, the prevalence of relational discourse serves to substantiate this point. Fairclough (2001) stated that discourse stemming from the advertising genre consistently rely upon relational constructions to engage the viewer in a relationship with the product, service, or company.

There are some guiding principles to contextualize and remind readers of fundamental aspects when one employs CDA. Fairclough posited that the value of text becomes real when embedded in social interaction, where texts are produced and interpreted against a background of cogent assumptions, also known as member’s resources (see Chapter 3, Role of the Researcher and Researcher’s Journal for more information). Recall that member’s resources (MR) are the social, linguistic, and visual attributes a researcher possesses for analyzing and interpreting identities and meaning with data (Fairclough, 2001). In essence, MR constitute a researcher’s background knowledge and dispositions. Woodside-Jiron (2004) stated, “understanding how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed informs our understandings of how authors work to ensure particular interpretations of text and how this engages our various member resources” (p. 187). Interpretive analysis involves how the analyst processes the data using MR (Fairclough, 2001). This process invariably requires judgment, therefore the following sections stem from an interpretation based on a single set of MR. However, the MR of the researcher are diverse and encompass experiences with admissions and recruitment in higher education, mass communication, and multimedia production. That said, the systematic application of CDA along with other scientific techniques, such as multiple points of data collection, reflect an endeavor to ensure rigor. The researcher fully discloses these items in Chapter 3, Role of the Researcher and Researcher’s Journal, and embraces the fact that alternative interpretations are plausible.
Process Analysis

The purpose of this section is to discuss the substantive and narrative themes from the six Web pages used for the sample: Home Page, About, Admissions, Academic Majors and Programs, Financial Aid, and Student Life pages. In essence, what appears in this section is an expansion of the preliminary analyses contained in Chapters 4 and 5. Specifically, I organize the findings around the aspects of Fairclough’s interpretive framework that appear in subsections that focus on (a) the contents of the language, (b) its subjects, (c) the relationship of the subjects, and (d) the connections between the role of language and the greater social structures it reflects and supports, the subject of the final section of Societal Analysis.

Contents of the Language

The contents of language accent certain activities and topics, which together inform the purpose of a message (Fairclough, 2001). The use of verbs and modality are elements of the contents of language that allow the analyst additional insight into the intent of the message producer(s) (Halliday, 1985, 1994; Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001). First, this section contains definitions of verbs and modality, as they are two important determinants of the purpose of a message. Both the verbs and modality sections also contain examples to illustrate their utility at this level of analysis. The section closes with a discussion of the purpose of the language found in the sample.

Verbs

The use of verbs plays a critical role in the content of messages (e.g., Halliday, 1985, 1994; Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001; Janks, 2005). The verbs describe various actions and demonstrate what the producer(s) of the message wants to communicate to viewers (Halliday, 1985, 1994; Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 1995b). The processes of the verbs emit a sense of being (relational), doing (action), and sensing (mental) (Halliday,

---

95 Reference to the institutions in the sample appears by the same abbreviations as in Chapters 4 and 5.
Action and relational verbs are the dominant verb type used in the sample. The intent here is to present the viewer with a number of options at her disposal and to establish a relationship with the viewer.

Careful examination of the data reveals the use of a number of action verbs (e.g., apply, discover, choose, explore, inquire, meet, visit) and clauses that position the prospective student as a powerful actor, one with multiple choices. The use of an array of action verbs serves to reinforce the promotional discourse by presenting a number of different activities that encompass the “college experience,” an experience over which the student enjoys autonomy (Askehave, 2007; Saichaie, 2010). An example from the IU Student Life page illustrates the point: “At IU, you can: Hang out at the Indiana Memorial Union, See Broadway touring companies, concerts, and big-name speakers at the IU Auditorium, Go skydiving through IU Outdoor Adventures, Work out in world-class facilities.” Representations of this nature serve to construct the prospective student as a consumer with the ability to choose among the services available at the institution (Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 1993, 2001; Saichaie, 2010).

The use of relational verbs indicates the intent of the producer to make one feel part of the institution and its culture (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001; Kittle & Ciba, 1999). The most frequent occurrence of relational discourse appears on the Admissions and Student Life pages. For example, the RC Admissions page features in different constructions: “Meet Rhodes students and hear what they love about their college experience” and “Talk to a professor about your major area of interest.” Relational discourse of this type links the social and academic aspects of higher education and serves to engage the viewer in a simulated personal relationship with the institution via its actors. This type of representation is common to private sector tactics in advertising and

---


97 Retrieved from [http://www.rhodes.edu/admissions/default.asp](http://www.rhodes.edu/admissions/default.asp) 1/7/11
is indicative of the growing consumerism in higher education (Fairclough, 2001; Gumport, 2000; Kittle & Ciba, 1997; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Fairclough (2001) argues that relational discourse represents an attempt to associate a viewer with a certain type of lifestyle. During this process, the viewer comes to accept the lifestyle in the face of constant and consistent bombardments of a particular type of content in a message. The power in this technique comes when the contents shape the viewer to the point they act upon a message, find it ideal, and seek to attain the lifestyle related to message (Fairclough, 2001).

Modality

Parallel to the processes in verbs is modality (Richardson, 2007). Simpson (1993) stated, “Modality refers broadly to a speaker’s attitude towards, opinions about, the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence” (p. 47). The modality of a phrase often represents possibility and uncertainty (Halliday, 1985, 1994; Fairclough 1995b). In a sense, uncertainty communicates the “may” and “might” of a message and/or an openly vague representation. The institutions use language to promote the opportunities available at the institution. For example, a common construction on the Admissions page is to simply list the dozens, frequently several hundreds, of student activities, clubs, and organizations as a way to present opportunity. For example, HU states, “Extracurricular opportunities at Harvard are virtually limitless with more than 400 official student organizations.” In essence, opportunity is nominalized by the abundance of co-curricular and social events offered by the institution. Viewed through the lens offered by CDA, it is the institution that is the provider of the opportunity, thus exacting power to control what is acceptable or unacceptable action and what it does or does not permit prospective students to do. The types of activities come to represent modes of social behavior (Fairclough, 2001).

Purpose

Verbs and modality work together to promote a number of activities and opportunities made available and acceptable by the institution. The institutions use the content on the websites to construct a virtual billboard for the campus and activities that contribute to its success and standing (see Subjects below). The intent of such constructions, both textually and visually, is to introduce the institution and provide inviting snapshots that typify the activities of the institutional actors who contribute to the campus community. The actors engage in a variety of endeavors, frequently prestigious in nature. For example, on the Home Page, the texts call out the accolades of a particular faculty member, student, or department while formulaic, but appealing, visual representations dominate the sample (e.g., scenes of students walking on nicely landscaped campus quadrangles). In essence, the texts often operate with more specificity while visuals appear with more generality.

Some variations exist on certain Web pages. As an example, the About page contains significantly more textual content and features language where agency is difficult to determine, more so than any other page in the sample. For example, HU’s page states, “The pursuit of excellence has long been a hallmark of Harvard. Since its founding in 1636, the College has assembled promising students and distinguished faculty and provided them with an environment and resources to develop their talents to the fullest.”99 Textual analysis on the About page reveals that the institution constructs itself as the enabler of success, ignoring the individual merits of the student herself. Viewed through the lens offered by CDA, such representations demonstrate the power residing with the institution, thus maintaining control over the viewer and prospective student (Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001). While the contents of the language provide insight into the intent of the producers, the types of subjects the

99 Retrieved from: http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/about/index.html 1/7/11
producers choose to represent at the institution are additional elements to examine when attempting to interpret the meaning in a message (Fairclough, 2001).

Subjects

The subjects of the message, particularly the types of actors, help indicate the intent of message (Fairclough, 2001). This section discusses the use of subjects and the types of actors found in the sample. Portrayal of the subjects consistently appears in active manner, both textually and visually. Active voice (e.g., announces, discovers, receives, wins) appears paired with images displaying the actors doing something lively (e.g., bicycling, cheering, talking, laughing, rock climbing, smiling), often in the presence of other college-going age students. College-age actors appear in the vast majority of the images that feature people. The actors appear generally attractive, healthy, and happy. As noted in the preliminary analysis, none of the actors appears depressed, distressed, disabled, obese, overweight, or otherwise unhealthy. Another common construction of subjects is an image of the student interacting with a faculty member (see Relationships or Figure 31, below).

Individual actors and groups appear closer, in a more personal distance, while images showing buildings appear at a distance in order to provide a distinct landmark (see Figure 4 in Chapter 5). Image construction of this nature reveals the author’s desire for the viewer to establish a relationship with the image subject (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Furthermore, images of architecture and statues represent the institution (Ramasubramanian et al. 2002). For example, on the SU site, many of the images on the website feature Hoover Tower directly or indirectly (see Figure 4 in Chapter 5). Furthermore, images of this type appear most frequently for the institutions in G2, the elite institutions in the sample (see Figure 4 or Figure 32 below). Viewed through the lens offered by CDA, such representations, especially those composed from a lower angle (see Representations below), symbolize the institutions’ power over its actors (Kress & van
Leeuwen, 2006). The section on Angle, below, discusses this type of composition in more detail.

Types of Actors

Both white and non-white actors appear. However, the numbers disproportionately favor white actors, specifically white males. For example, of the 201 images on the Home Page, 18 (or about 9%) show non-white males and 12 (or about 6%) show non-white females. The trend of underrepresenting non-white actors persists throughout the sample. The numbers for non-white faculty are lower still. Non-white faculty members appear in seven images (1%) in the sample. None of the non-white faculty actors are female (0%). In addition, the non-white faculty members, or actors posed as faculty members, always appear in the presence of students (Figure 31).

Figure 31: Non-white Faculty Representation

Source: Retrieved from http://www.princeton.edu/admission/ 1/7/11

Textually, the matter of diversity appears linked to geography or avoided altogether. Of the infrequent references, few provide more than a cursory acknowledgement of the topic. This example from the HU About page exemplifies both points: “Students come from all 50 states and from over 80 countries; from cities, suburbs, small towns and farms; from public, private and parochial schools; from every
ethnic and religious background; and from across the economic spectrum.” Viewed through the lens offered by CDA, institutions do a poor job of visually representing non-white actors, which often contradicts the rhetoric espoused in the mission statements of the institutions to embrace and promote diversity in all its forms (Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Taylor & Morphew, 2010; Urciuoli, 2003, 2009). In essence, the institutions do the “talking” about diversity but fail to do the “walking” when it comes to representing the diverse actors at the institution.

These findings also speak to support for existing social structures, as non-white actors do not appear with any regularity in the sample. Textually, indirect references to diversity appear. The institutions in the sample use “culture,” “diversity,” or “multicultural,” which commonly appear as deployed shifters that serve as proxies for representations of ethnicity and race (Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Urciuoli, 2003, 2009). Of the institutions that specifically reference diversity with text, SU makes the most direct attempt: “Take the time to learn more about why diversity at Stanford means more than geographic, racial, or ethnic differences.” Otherwise, fairly generic or indirect textual references appear. For example, IU offers the following: “Celebrate Latino culture at the Festival Latino.” Regarding religious diversity, only the G3 institutions and UI mention the subject on the pages in the sample. Viewed from a lens offered by CDA, eschewing a topic either serves to reinforce societal norms or places little importance on the subject (Fairclough, 2001). While the subjects of the language provide insight into the intent of the producers, the type of relationships the subjects engage in also help the analyst interpret the meaning in a message.

---

100 Retrieved from: [http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/about/index.html](http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/about/index.html) 1/07/11


Relationships

This section looks at elements of visual and textual relationships portrayed utilizing the image act, angle, distance, placement, sequencing, size, and textual representations of the relationship of actors in the sample data. Since multimodal (e.g., text, image) language appears on the websites, the way the composition of text and image subjects relate to each other and to the viewer becomes significant when interpreting the message and highlighting the utility of CDA (Hall, 1997; Fairclough, 2001; Kress, 2004; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Image Act

The image act represents what the producer wants the viewer to take from a particular image: “the image wants something from the viewers – wants them to do something (come closer, stay at a distance) or to form a pseudo-social bond of a particular kind with the represented participant” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 118). Many of the images appear in a “candid” or “slice or life” composition, as if taken without any sort of predisposed purpose (see Figure 5 or Figure 13 in Chapter 5). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) call these images an “offer.” Images composed in an offertory manner show “the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case” (p.119). Such constructions reinforce the snapshot interpretation mentioned above in order to present a scenario in which a prospective student might reasonably find herself (Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 1993, 1995a). Conversely, images where the subject addresses the viewer appear less frequently. In this type of composition, the subject is posed to “demand” something from the viewer, namely her attention. Kress and van Leeuwen stated that in “demand” images, the producer of the text wants the viewer to purposely engage in a type of imaginary relationship with the actor in the image. Figure 6 in Chapter 5 provides a good example of a “demand” composition where all of the actors address the viewer. So, if the viewer makes any acknowledgement of the image, she is
compelled to consider the expressions on the faces of the image subjects, which typically are welcoming and friendly. The text on the image “Welcome to Eastern!” is highly cohesive and works in conjunction with the images to invite the viewer to the institution. Similar occurrences populate the sample as well.

Angle

The angle of an actor in an image also reveals a relationship with the viewer. The height of an angle indicates issues of power in an image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). An image shown from a low angle (i.e., pointing up) directs the viewer to either consciously or unconsciously look up to the subject (see Figure 32 or Figure 7 in Chapter 5). Kress and van Leeuwen stated images constructed in this manner give the depicted actor a “symbolic power” over the viewer (p. 140). Conversely, an image shown from a high angle (i.e., pointing down), gives the viewer the power over the actors in the image (see Figure 13). The viewer will either consciously or unconsciously look down to the subject. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, images constructed in this manner give the impression that the viewer has some semblance of control of the social world in depiction (i.e., the world at one’s finger tips). An image showing the actors at the same level (i.e., eye line) depicts an equal relationship (e.g., Figures 9, 15, and 16 in Chapter 5) and demonstrates balanced power differences (Kress & van Leeuwen). The majority of the images in the sample appear at the same level as the viewer. An image composed in this manner expresses the producer’s desire to communicate that the viewer and the subject are of equal stature. Utilizing such an angle complements the relational discourse found in the textual representations (Kress & van Leeuwen). Low angle images appear as the second most frequent in the sample. Those constructed from a low angle transfer power to the actor, and by proxy the institution, while images constructed from a high angle give the viewer power and control in the situation (Kress & van Leeuwen).
Distance

The distance between actors in an image also signifies a type of relationship between the viewer and the actors in the image. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) described close social distance as an arm length, or the distance it would take for the actors in the image to touch one another. All of the images featuring more than one actor appear within close social distance, which serves to create a welcoming environment and show that actors have no trouble relating to one another. To further communicate a welcoming environment, the producer of an image can frame the image to increase or reduce the distance between the actors in the image and the viewer. For example, a close up, or an extreme close up, signifies the producer’s intent to create a personal relationship with the viewer (Figures 9 and 16). It also serves to communicate an intimate setting whereby the closer the frame of the image of an actor, the higher the likelihood that the producer wants the viewer to engage in an imaginary relationship with the image subject. Composition of this kind acts to complement or supplement the “demand”/“offer” construction discussed above.

Figure 32: Low-Angle Image Construction

Medium shots that show the whole of the subject but not at great distance or without much space around it appear as well (Figure 5 and Figure 8). Images composed in this manner show the intent of the producer to put the subject just out of grasp, but close enough for the viewer to contemplate its salient qualities. Kress and van Leeuwen liken such construction to items displayed in a storefront window and state representations of this kind appear frequently in product advertisements (e.g., automobiles, cellular phones). Longer shots, or shots that show the whole of an actor or object (e.g., buildings) from a distance, focus on the stature of an object. Framing a subject in this manner places it at a “public distance” from the viewer. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) describe that composition in this manner signifies that the subject and viewer “are to remain strangers” (p. 125). Viewed through the lens offered by CDA, placing icon campus landmarks in this way contradicts the relational discourse presented in the text. These images show “the institution” apart from other actors and in an impersonal state. Aside from long shots of campus buildings, a critical dimension of these images presents subjects in close social relations that help to personify the institution and reduce the distances between the viewer and the institution.

Placement and Sequence

The placement and sequence of the language also signifies a type of relationship with the viewer. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) introduced the notion that the placement of language affects its information value, thus its salience. Where images, text, and menus appear is central to determining how the producer intends the viewer to relate to the content (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

As previously mentioned in Chapter 5, websites appear in a vertical (Figure 10) or horizontal triptych (Figure 11). Placement of image and text within this framework reveals the amount of informational value the producer places on the content. The horizontal triptych (Figure 33) contains three zones: Given, Mediator, and New. The Given is assumed to be information the viewer possesses as a part of her member
resources. Commonly, the placement of navigational items appears in this zone on a website (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Lynch & Horton, 2009). On the right, “new” content appears. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) stated that content appearing on the right is something the viewer does not yet know about and must pay special attention to. Repeatedly, this content is an image and explains which images have particular prominence over text or a secondary navigational panel (see Figures 13, 14, 22, 23, 26). The contents in the middle serve as the Mediator between the Given and the New. Content in this zone blends the qualities of the other zones. Figures 13, 17, 18, 23, and 27 demonstrate the horizontal triptych framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Given</th>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>New</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Figure 33: Three-Column Horizontal Triptych (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006)**


Within a vertical triptych (Figure 34), placement also is important to understanding what content the producer values. In Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) vertical triptych model, the three zones are Ideal, Mediator, and Real (Figure 34). Ideal content frequently appears at the top of a page. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) stated that content with Ideal information value is the most salient, or at least deemed so by the producer. In addition, the literature on website design supports this notion (Krug, 2006; Lynch & Horton, 2009). Images regularly occupy this space on websites analyzed in the sample data. For example, see Figures 15-19, 22, and 26. The use of a banner image or the placement of an institution’s logo often demonstrates the practice of placing Ideal information at the top (Figure 15 and Figure 16). The content placed at the bottom of the page is Real and functions to provide more specific content (i.e., the fine print). The
Mediator in the horizontal triptych plays a similar role in the vertical triptych by connecting the Given and the New.

![Diagram](mediator.png)

**Figure 34: Three-Column Vertical Triptych (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006)**


Figure 23 is a good representation of both frameworks. The top left contains the institution’s seal and logo. Two images appear on the top of the page located closely to the primary navigation menu. Along the left side is a navigational menu and along the right side are images, one of which functions as a thumbnail to a video. In the center of the page is text. Below the fold, the contents pertain to details about the costs of attending RC. In essence, the information at the top introduces the “promise of the product” and the “hook” for the producer in the hopes of getting the viewer to attend to the details further down the page (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 203). Kress and van Leeuwen equated this type of composition to that of newspaper and magazine layout that suggests that the goal of the page design is to get the viewer’s attention and entice them to read further. Information value is not limited to placement on a page, but is within an image itself. In
cultures where reading occurs from left to right, the focus of the message typically appears in the center or to the right and it can speak to the salience within images and textual representations as well. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explain that the producers endeavor to strike a balance in the content or heavily focus on one type of representation depending on the message they want to communicate to the viewer.

**Size**

The size of the image also reveals the intent of the producer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Typically, large visuals consume a third of the page or more (Krug, 2006; Lynch & Horton, 2009). Large visuals signal that the producer places a high value on the image and wants the viewer to focus attention on the image due to the message it communicates (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Krug, 2006; Lynch & Horton, 2009). Large primary images occur in multiple instances in the sample. Figure 10 and Figure 13 show large primary images on the page, signifying the level of importance the image has to the overall message on the page. A construction of this nature draws the attention to the image and away from other items on the page, communicating that the producer places high information value on the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In addition, the use of multiple visuals on a page, or automatically rotating images, may serve to distract a viewer from otherwise useful content (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In an increasingly visual culture, researchers (e.g., Hall, 1997; Kress, 2000) stated that when text and image appear on the screen, the text is subservient to the image. Thus, research examining the ways colleges and universities use language to attract and recruit students must not discount or ignore the importance of images.

**Textual Representations of Relationships**

Textual representations of relationships come in the form of the use of personal pronouns, typically in the form of “you” and “we.” Askehave (2007) stated that “we” appears when the main actors’ actions are in nature supportive of individuals. For example, “Our goal in admissions and financial aid is clear: We want to bring the best
people to Harvard, regardless of their ability to pay — and we do.” This representation intends to show the supportive nature of Harvard’s financial aid policy.

Another example of the way relationships appear on websites is the use of “you.” Askehave (2007) stated that the “you” is associated with the actor as the recipient of an action or states the emotional condition of the viewer. For example, HSU states, “You are the focus here,”103 and IU states, “You’ll Love Being Here.”104 A combination of personal pronouns appears on the UIUC Financial Aid page: “Our goal is to assist you and your family in securing the resources necessary to fund your education.”105 With regard to “we,” the data suggests the institution is a supportive service provider and the viewer “you” is the benefactor of the services and experiences offered by the institution. Viewed through the lens offered by CDA, institutions use personal pronouns in the text in an attempt to convey highly relational and personal feelings (e.g., use of “you”). The producers of this text attempt to talk against the notion that large, frequently public institutions are impersonal and rigid (Saichaie, 2010).

Fairclough’s (1993, 1995a, 2001) “synthetic you” provides additional insight into such constructions:

the synthetic personalization of the audience member is a matter of the position which is constructed for the consumer…But it is also in part a matter of the personalized relationship between the producer and consumer, as evidenced in textual features which are widespread in advertising discourse – direct address of audience members with you, and imperative sentences. (p 168, emphasis existing)

For example, the IU text, “You’ll love being here,” is an example of the synthetic you, although others populate the sample as well. BSC states, “There’s a rich life beyond your textbooks!”106 On the EWU site, there is link to an entire section called “Just for You.”107

103 Retrieved from: http://www.humboldt.edu/humboldt/about 1/7/11
104 Retrieved from: http://admit.indiana.edu/life/index.shtml 1/7/11
105 Retrieved from: http://www.osfa.uiuc.edu/ 1/7/11
106 Retrieved from: http://www.gotobsc.com/bsclife.htm 1/7/11
The use of the synthetic you is another indication of promotional discourse (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001).

Recurrent use of the third person also appears. For example, “Princeton seeks to achieve the highest levels of distinction in the discovery and transmission of knowledge and understanding”\(^\text{108}\) and “Iowa celebrated International Education Week Nov. 15-19.”\(^\text{109}\) Repeated representation in this manner indicates the conscious effort of the producer to help build identity, which in this case is the brand of the institution (e.g., Anctil, 2008; Toma et al., 2005). A hallmark of technique of the advertising is repetition (Anctil, 2008; Fairclough, 1995b, 2001). Repetition is a form of affective conditioning designed to expose the viewer to a certain topic, phrase, and product frequently during a short time span (e.g., the 30 second commercial). Anctil (2008) reported that colleges and universities seamlessly employ this technique in order to continuously remind the viewer of the presence institution whenever possible. While the components of composition provide insight into understanding the intent of the producers and the desired affect on the viewer, examining the connections of the components of production process are important to interpreting the message.

Connections

Connections focus on the role of language in what is described in the data (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001). The data in this sample suggest a reliance on promotional discourse that draws on advertising genres. This is not wholly surprising given previous research on academic marketing that demonstrates that students want, and perhaps expect, to be sold a “college experience” (e.g., Poock & Lefond, 2001; Ramasubramanian et al. 2002). As noted in the literature review, the trend of academic

\(^{107}\) Retrieved from: http://www.ewu.edu/About.xml 1/7/11

\(^{108}\) Retrieved from: http://www.princeton.edu/main/about/ 1/7/11

marketing did not begin development until the late 1970s and early 1980s when prospective students began to assert themselves as customers (Paulsen, 1990). Colleges and universities responded by adopting techniques from private sector practices in an effort to maintain a distinctive identity and compete for customers (e.g., Bok, 2003; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). However, this was not always the case. Fairclough (1995a) found that the discourse from academic marketing materials in the late 1960s revealed that the content was primarily informational – constructed in a “take it or leave it” fashion (p. 156). The institution retained power over the prospective student. The increased competition for students seemingly marked a positive moment for prospective students as the institutions identified the need to embrace more student-centered discourse in order to attract students. The growth of the use of personal pronouns (e.g., we, you) indicates a shift to more relational discourse. Fairclough (1993, 1995a) noted the use of personal pronouns as a hallmark of advertising genres and as a concerted move toward focusing on an audience of prospective students.

Further evidence of a shift to a promotional discourse and advertising genre is the reliance on endorsements from third-party entities. A common practice in advertising is to promote a product by mentioning its superiority over a competitor (e.g., 4 out of 5 dentists recommend Brand X toothpaste). Promoting the ranking of an institution in a third-party publication is a similar parallel to this practice. With the exception of G2 institutions, all of the institutions mention a third-party publication on the Web pages in the sample. The use of third-party rankings is an attempt to equate prestige, academic performance, affordability, livability, and so on, with some sort of tangible referent. Non-G2 institutions use rankings to appear as more elite while G2 institutions avoid mentioning rankings as it may serve to delegitimize their standings (more in Chapter 7).

Viewed through the lens offered by CDA, a closer inspection of the data reveals that institutions still retain significant control and power over the prospective student. The use of student-centered discourse positions the prospective student, or client, with
authority and power. For example, many of the institutions permit the student to tailor a
major to her individual interests: “When it comes to majors, Centre offers real benefits.
Since we encourage self-designed majors, your choices are virtually unlimited.”110 This
content is the opening text on the page and appears at the top of the page. However, at the
very bottom of the page the following text appears: “Humanities, the only courses
currently required of every student at Centre College, are an integral part of the Centre
experience and of a full and rich education in the liberal arts.”111 This is one example of
how institutions represent control over the viewer. Fairclough (1995a) noted that
avoidance is another tactic commonly employed by colleges and universities to mask the
level of control they demonstrate on the institutional websites: “These requirements are
included in the text, but not in overtly obligational forms” (p. 157, emphasis existing).

In reality, prospective students quickly click through websites and are not likely
to read in detail (Poock & Lefond, 2001). And even if a viewer does want more
information, research demonstrates that users frequently experience fatigue due to the
number of layers of pages they must navigate to find desired information and face
frustration with lack of functioning search engines (e.g., Krug, 2006; Poock & Lefond,
2001). The increasing focus on the use of images also serves to help the institutions avoid
openly obligational presentation of content. In a sense, images act as ultimate shifters,
leaving the institutions free from implicitly requiring anything from viewers while still
communicating they offer an experience associated with college-going. The viewer can
quickly get a sense of the institution and its offerings and not necessarily the details over
which the institutions maintain control. So, the obligations of viewers are in a sense
“hidden” and obfuscated by compelling language. The adoption of promotional discourse
and advertising genre marks the historical and social shift regarding the nature and

110 Retrieved from: http://centre.edu/majors/index.html 01/07/11
111 Retrieved from: http://centre.edu/majors/index.html 01/07/11
objectives of higher education. A discussion of this shift is the focus of the Societal analysis section below.

**Societal Analysis**

The intent of the societal analysis dimension of Fairclough’s framework is to provide an explanation about the relationship between language and social practices, which, in turn, affect social practices and structures (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001). Language privileges certain types of knowledge and works to build prestige for certain types of social institutions, such as colleges and universities. The institutions then harness this privilege to reproduce and ritualize the conditions that sustain them (Gee, 2005). This level of analysis considers the way textual and visual representation affix identities to the primary societal actors: the institution and the prospective student.

**Institutional Identity**

The discourse in the sample reveals that institutions describe higher education as a “product” and do very little to differentiate their “product” from competitors. Furthermore, the packaging of higher education as a product represents an increasing shift toward an entrepreneurial identity (Bok, 2003; Boyles, 2007; Gumport, 2000; Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004). As such, colleges and universities no longer solely focus on the educational process dedicated to preparing learners for intellectual development and civic engagement. Rather, higher education becomes the training grounds for skill acquisition in which the product of education is a worker, ready to serve private sector outlets.

While the institutions in the sample vary widely by type, control, geographic region, selectivity, and a bevy of other characteristics, all resort to rather systematic representations of the institutions. The academic endeavor associated with higher education takes a secondary role with all of the intangibles available to the prospective student at the forefront of representations. Stately architecture and images of pristine campus scenery appear as the primary focus of the images or as a backdrop for its actors.
Active and approachable actors adorn appear on Web pages in the sample. School colors predominantly figure into the color scheme of the Web pages in another attempt to further imprint the institution’s identity on the viewer. Previous research on the marketing of higher education supports this assertion. Recall, Ramasubramanian et al. (2002) posited that representations of this nature will create a positive impression of academic prestige and reputation; namely, it will look like what college is “supposed” to look like to prospective students. Warnings to not judge a book by its cover fall on deaf ears: “If the college or university looks good, it must be good” (Anctil, 2008, p. 82).

What appears on the websites is a generic representation of the “lifestyle” associated with attending college. “The ‘product’ on offer is not simply (or perhaps not at all) courses and study programmes – but all the ‘extras’ – that is, an exciting experience coupled with a friendly atmosphere, beautiful surroundings, and campus (support) facilities” (Askehave, 2007, p. 739). Such discourse presents an unrealistic depiction of higher education. Postsecondary education requires discipline, focus, and hard work. Representations depicting or describing such realities are minimal at best. Moreover, colleges and universities play an important role in society in terms of teaching, research, and service, yet the representations that appear on the websites do little to support these tenets.

The adoption of private sector practices serves to promote product awareness and build brand identity, which aligns higher education with a more entrepreneurial identity (Anctil, 2008; Askehave, 2007; Bok, 2003; Boyles, 2007; Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001; Pulley, 2003; Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004; Toma et al., 2005). The mixture of information and persuasion in message construction has become seemingly and seamlessly naturalized and integrated into the discourse about higher education (Fairclough, 2001). In the process the identity of higher education has become destabilized (Fairclough, 2001). Slaughter and Rhoads concluded, “The idea of a college or university as a space
for public discussion, debate, commentary, and critique is pushed to the background” (p. 333).

Prospective Student Identity

With regard to the identity ascribed to the prospective students, the discourse reveals the construction of an ideal student, one prepared to face the demands of private sector labor market. As previously mentioned, admissions, communications, and marketing offices spend numerous hours and resources deliberating over the type of actors to present in order to represent the type of student who attends the institution. So, it is no coincidence when a particular type of actor appears frequently on the website.

Each of the institutions in the sample embrace the notion of diversity and equal opportunity for all those who wish to apply; yet representations of primarily one type of actor persist throughout the sample. Data analysis suggests the actor is college-age, reasonably affluent, white, and often, male. Students appear in close social relations with each other and commonly appear in a manner that permits the viewer to establish an imaginary relationship with the actor portrayed in the image. All prospective students are welcomed regardless of social standing and can have access to occasionally diverse (i.e., non-white), active, and fun-loving friends or peers (Figure 18 and Figure 29). However, closer examination of the data using CDA suggests something quite different. The bottom line is that race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and sexual orientation are poorly represented. For example, existing literature (e.g., Golden, 2007) demonstrates that matters of social class still play out on college campuses, especially at elite institutions. So, the notion that students from all social strata are welcome may be quite different from the reality awaiting them upon arrival.

The repeated representation of one social model (i.e., the white male) transmits a dominant social value (Fairclough, 2001). In essence, if colleges and universities continually utilize language representing one type of actor, it is reasonable to assume the messages are designed to hail such an actor by using language to make the institution
appeal to this segment of society (Fairclough, 2001). The persistent representation of one type of actor can alienate those who do not fit that standing or do not aspire to fit that standing (Fairclough, 2001). For example, if non-white prospective students confront consistent messages portraying a white actor, it may have an isolating effect and discourage those outside of the dominant social model from seeking access to social institutions, such as colleges and universities (Fairclough, 2001).

In addition, the increasing reliance on the use of visuals is a result of the influence of the advertising genre on higher education (e.g., Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 1995a, 2001; Schneider, 2006). Institutions employ visuals with greater frequency to allow prospective students to imaginatively insert themselves into the lifestyle offered by the institution (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001). Such construction allows students to gain a sense as powerful consumers who can choose from prestigious institutions that offer a suite of co-curricular opportunities (e.g., intramural sports, Greek life, student media). Institutions soften or avoid mentioning the realities surrounding admissions selectivity, cost of attendance, and other institutional controls (e.g., academic standards, housing), which often leaves the prospective student as a powerless applicant (Fairclough, 1993; McDonough, 1994).

Working synchronously with visuals are textual representations that reveal that the institution retains a great deal of control over its actors with strategic or limited placement of obligational discourse. Seldom does the institution make demands of its students or set standards for student accountability. Conclusions from prior research on academic marketing materials using CDA support this assertion (Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001; Saichaie, 2010). The paucity of research examining academic marketing acknowledges the commodification of the college-choice process (e.g., Hartley & Morphew, 2008; McDonough, 1994). An indication of this transition is the integration of discourse that represents the students as workers rather than learners (e.g., Bok, 2003; Boyles, 2007; Fairclough, 2001; McDonough, 1994). In essence, this
shift is a reflection of the focus on education to vocationalism (Boyles, 2007; Labaree, 1997). The marked discourse accentuating skill acquisition is a result of closer ties to private entrepreneurial and government entities (Boyles, 2007; Fairclough, 1993, 1995, 2001; Gumport, 2000; Mautner, 2005a; Saichaie, 2010; Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004).

Chapter 7 provides a response to the research questions guiding this study. In addition, the chapter includes a discussion of the implications for practice. The chapter concludes with indications for future research.
CHAPTER 7
SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how colleges and universities use language to represent themselves to prospective students on their institutional websites. Organizations like colleges and universities experience similar levels of isomorphism, a constraint on one unit in a population to operate like other units that face environmental conditions (Hawley, 1968). Therefore, like other organizations, colleges and universities compete for customers (i.e., students) and resources (i.e., tuition dollars), institutional legitimacy, and political power. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) described how organizational relevance to this competition translates into economic and social fitness. Consequently, to maintain fitness, colleges and universities must rely on a variety of strategies in order to create and maintain a distinctive identity, one they attempt to communicate to a number of audiences.

Since higher education is largely an intangible product, the challenge for admissions and recruitment offices is to cultivate their identity as they seek to emphasize any tangible evidence necessary to elevate their reputation and acquire scarce resources (e.g., Anctil, 2008; Bok, 2003; Conard & Conard, 2000; Kotler & Fox 1995; McDonough, 1994; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Powell & DiMaggio, 1983; Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004; Toma et al., 2005). To enhance reputation, admissions and recruitment offices use language as a means to accomplish these goals. Institutional websites function as a crucial component for admissions and recruitment endeavors due to the mounting role they play in the college-choice process for prospective students (Adelman, 2006; Anctil, 2008; Anderson & Reid, 1999; Carnevale, 2005; Hossler, 1999; Pooch & Lefond, 2001).

Nascent attention on the role that websites play in the college-choice process appears outside of the trade publications and reports generated by privately held consulting firms specializing in academic marketing (Hossler, 1999; Pooch & Lefond,
Hartley and Morphew (2008) stated that existing academic research on the ways colleges and universities represent themselves in their admissions and recruitment materials lack a sound theoretical foundation. In essence, conclusions stemming from empirical research about admissions and recruitment practices remain extremely limited. Due to the importance of institutional websites to both prospective students and the colleges and universities, it is appropriate and timely to investigate how colleges and universities represent themselves through the use of language on institutional websites.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an appropriate theoretical and methodological approach to examine language constructed by social institutions such as colleges and universities. Fairclough (1992a, 1995a, 2001) argued that through the close, careful study of language, it is possible to not only describe and interpret representations, but also to explain the formation of relationships, processes, and structures that affect individuals. The theoretical component to Fairclough’s (2001) approach to discourse analysis is concerned not only with overt or seemingly obvious representations in language, but also with obscured or opaque messages veiled or embedded when given only a cursory overview. Methodologically, CDA offers a process that can illuminate representations within the text, providing the researcher with a systematic set of inquiries to analyze both textual and visual constructs in relation to social phenomena.

To investigate the role of language on institutional websites, data from 12 institutional websites were analyzed in order to ascertain how colleges and universities employ language to represent themselves. Institutions were grouped according to a similar set of institutional characteristics based on their 2010 Carnegie Classification (Carnegie Foundation, 2010). The grouping of institutions aligns with previous research examining representations in textual and visual elements in admissions and recruitment materials distributed by colleges and universities (e.g., Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Morphew & Taylor, 2010). Within each group exist similarities across admission rates (i.e., percentage admitted), area (e.g., rural, suburban,
urban), athletic conference membership, control (public or private), level (e.g., length of degree programs), location (e.g., geographic region), student type (i.e., student body type), and undergraduate enrollment (number of undergraduates). However, between each group is a significant amount of variance in terms of the similarities they share within each group.

This chapter has three purposes: (a) to respond to the research questions, (b) to discuss the implications of this study for practice, and (c) to consider areas for future research related to academic marketing. Due to the dearth of research about the language, both textual and visual, used by college and universities on their institutional websites, this study focuses on types of discourses active on college and university websites and revolves around the following overarching question:

**Research Question**

- In what ways do colleges and universities use language (textual and visual) to represent themselves on institutional websites?

Since little is known about the nature of discourse on college and university websites, the preceding question operated as a principal guide for the study while the following questions provided a more specific focus. As institutional websites increasingly become the primary tool for admissions and recruiting offices, one might expect to find discourse similar to other promotional items produced by colleges and universities, such as viewbooks. However, the extent to what type of discourse appears on college and university websites remains largely unexplored (Saichaie, 2010). Fairclough’s approach to CDA allows the researcher to discursively analyze language in use on college and university websites. Therefore, the following questions provide a more specific focus related to CDA.

**Research Sub-Questions**

1. What similarities/dissimilarities exist in the language used to represent institutions within similar institutional types?
2. What similarities/dissimilarities exist in the language used to represent the institutions of dissimilar institutional types?

3. How are social goods (e.g., class, gender, race, sexual orientation) represented in the language used on institutional websites between and within classifications?

Response to Research Questions

In this section, I address the research questions utilizing the data analysis presented in the previous three chapters. The responses to the sub-questions 2 and 3 appear together by Web page in order to coherently attend to the research questions, while a separate subsection appears discussing social goods (sub-question 4). Response to the overarching research question that guided the study will appear at the end of the section as a summary and as a transition to this study’s implications for practice and directions for future research.

Home Page

The language on the Home Pages exhibits promotional discourse by repeatedly touting the distinct accomplishments of current institutional actors (e.g., departments, faculty, students, teams) and of the institutions as a whole. The prominence of institutional actors provides areas of distinction, which enhances the profile of the institution. Visuals play a central role for each institution as well. Words and phrases are short and use active voice. Third person construction appears on all of the sites (e.g., Stanford Hospital names Amir Dan Rubin, president, CEO)\(^{112}\) as a way to help reinforce brand awareness (Anctil, 2008; Fairclough, 1995a). All Home Pages feature events and news at the institution. The news items identify faculty or student achievements and departmental or institutional recognition in order to help facilitate notions of prestige. The events discuss academic deadlines, athletic competitions, invited speakers, campus

\(^{112}\) Retrieved from: [http://stanford.edu](http://stanford.edu) 11/10/10
or student organization activities, holidays or weather-related content to show the breadth of happenings at the institution. Admissions-related content appears on the top half of the page and all of the institutions have navigation dedicated to these topics (e.g., About, Academics, Student Life) signifying that the producer places a high value on the content. The exception is UIUC, which has only one direct portal for prospective students on its Home Page and it appears in the middle of the Home Page.

Another interesting finding is that RC is the only institution in the sample to feature a direct link to financial aid and scholarships on the Home Page. Research on college choice demonstrates that content and information related to financial aid and scholarships is something to which prospective students want easy access (e.g., Hossler, 1999; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997; Nora, 2004; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Perna, 2004, 2006b; Poock & Lefond, 2001; Venegas, 2006). However, the data in the sample reveal a lack of intent to provide this content. The G2 institutions feature a link on the Home Pages, but it appears in combination with another term (e.g., Admissions & Aid) and requires the viewer to navigate through at least two more page levels to find content related to financial aid. In the case of SU, an expandable menu that contains a link to financial aid appears; however, the menu is set to a default position, which is collapsed and hidden. Given the recent research describing what students do not understand about the nature of financial aid (e.g., Avery & Hoxby, 2004; Kim et al., 2009; Perna, 2004; Venegas, 2006), displaying content in this manner lends support for research suggesting presentation of content this way serves to reinforce existing social structures (e.g., Boyles, 2007; Trowler, 2001). Placement of financial aid content on a separate page not only forces the user to click through to another page, or more, to view the content. Representation in this manner also contradicts the literature on basic web design (e.g., Krug, 2006), research on web design (e.g., Mitra & Cohen, 1999), the preferences of prospective students (e.g., Poock & Lefond, 2001; Schneider, 2006), and
commentary on both web design and college choice (e.g., Adelman, 2006; Hossler, 1999) suggesting that the clearer the path to complicated and desired content the better.

Visually, the institutions in the sample share similar representations of classroom interaction and campus scenery. Images of architecture and student life are the second most frequently occurring images on the Home Page. Research on academic marketing suggests that students want to see what college “looks” like, so such representations are not surprising (e.g., Anctil, 2008, Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Poock & Lefond, 2001; Ramasubramanian et al., 2002; Schneider, 2006). Fairclough (1993, 1995a) stated that colleges and universities attempt to create an image into which the viewer can imaginatively place herself. Limited research suggests that students associate well-kept landscapes and modern buildings with perceptions of quality of the institution (Ramasubramanian et al., 2002).

About

The About page serves to expand on notions of prestige foregrounded on the Home Page, a similar characteristic for all of the institutions in the sample. Promotional discourse of this type is common for representations by colleges and universities (e.g., Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 1993, 1995a; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Saichaie, 2010; Urciuoli, 2003, 2009). The language works to establish the institutions’ records of accomplishments and how those elements will serve the interests of its future graduates. In addition, the terms “leader” and “leadership” frequently appear, although explanations seldom accompany them (Urciuoli, 2003, 2009), thus opening a cause for uncertainty of the claims (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001; Janks 2005). Also, visuals play a minimal role on this page.

With the exception of G2 institutions, all mention either a direct or indirect reference to an award from a third-party publication. Viewed through a lens offered by CDA, the use of quotations reflects a desire to project a certain quality on the content (Halliday, 1985, 1994; Janks, 2005), which in this case is some level of prestige due to
the source of the quotation. Placed in the context of existing research on academic marketing, such language reflects an attempt to highlight a tangible point of distinction (e.g., Anctil, 2008, Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Sauder & Epseland, 2009). Research from organizational literature provides additional insight into the matter. In fields with prevalent isomorphism, such as higher education, organizations adopt the tactics of similar organizations perceived as more legitimate or successful (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In this case, non-elite institutions promote rankings as a means to symbolize their similarity and standing in comparison to elite institutions. Conversely, the elite institutions avoid mentioning rankings because such acknowledgement may delegitimize their standing. Further discussion on this topic appears below in the Similarity section.

The About pages for the G1 and G2 institutions (the most elite institutions in the sample) focus on the prestige of the institutions and utilize promotional text to represent their “world-renowned” standings. Also, both G1 and G2 schools mention “traditions,” although they represent it differently. G1 institutions discuss tradition in terms of service to their respective community, state, and nation. G2 institutions emphasize tradition in relation to the number of years of existence (i.e., their founding year). The G3 and G4 institutions are similar within and between the groups. For example, G3 and G4 institutions use language differently than G1 and G2 to represent a level of prestige that focuses on local, regional, or state prominence. The G3 and G4 institutions utilize discourse focused on the outcomes of higher education related to the private benefits (e.g., career oriented). For example, EWU describes a focus that “allows Eastern to accomplish its mission for preparing well-rounded students ready to hit the ground running in their chosen career fields.”

113 Retrieved from: http://www.ewu.edu/About.xml 01/07/11
Admissions

Visuals are the predominant mode of communication on the Admissions pages. Scenes of co-curricular student life activities are common. Text on the Admissions pages speaks of agency through student-centered discourse constructed around the notions of opportunities and personalization. Institutions use text to represent a welcoming environment where the viewer has many options, meets new and interesting people, and envisions limitless experiences. Much of the language features highly relational discourse, commonly constructed through the use of personal pronouns. Existential processes also appear with the institution serving as the conduit for such opportunities. The following example on the IU site illuminates both relational and existential discourse at work: “College should be like this: Your place to shine.”114 The Admissions pages have a more casual tone and feature numerous graphical elements (e.g., shapes, drawings, arrows, colors). See Figure 19 and Figure 21 for examples. The Admissions page contains links to additional content on SNS in an effort to provide a parallel relational platform (Figure 18). The page design also changes as the Admissions page serves as a hub to admissions-focused topics such as campus life, financial aid, and academic majors and programs (Figure 19).

Chapter 5 spoke of within-group similarities and differences on the Admissions pages; however, some textual findings are worth noting as well. RC is the only G3 institution to promote use of Common Application on its Admissions site, although all three G3 institutions participate in the program. CC waives the application fee for those who apply online but it does not heavily promote this fact on the Web pages in the sample. The textual representations on SOU’s Admissions page are different from the other Admissions pages within G4. The language on SOU’s Admissions page has more in common with G2 institutions, if anything, and uses text that most aligns with the

---

114 Retrieved from: http://admit.indiana.edu/ 01/07/11
traditional notions of a liberal arts education with a focus on civic engagement and intellectual development (Breneman, 1994; Labaree, 1997). It is interesting since this type of discourse appears in only one other instance on the SOU website (the Student Life page) and does not persist on the rest of the pages in the sample or website. Instead, SOU utilizes rather formulaic promotional discourse of higher education marketing.

Academic Majors and Programs

The Academic Majors and Programs (AMP) pages for the institutions use minimal images and an abundance of hyperlinks. The limited images that appear in the data typically depict actors engaged in seemingly scholarly activities (e.g., reading) or working in a lab with scientific equipment or talking with a non-college-aged actor (e.g., faculty member). The AMP pages feature text that presents students with a number of options to choose from when deciding on a concentration or major, even the freedom to create a major that fits their specific interests. This type of discourse seemingly grants students agency and control over their programs of study because the institutions avoid the specifics of this process or send students through various levels of navigation to find specifics on programs. The discourse ranges from preparation for a career, graduate studies, or intellectual development in general. The open-ended type of construction cuts both ways and opens up degrees of uncertainty. Regardless of the student’s choice in major, the student will work in close contact with supportive faculty and take classes with around 20 students, often less. Hartley and Morphew (2008) stated that this type of promotion is unrealistic considering the demands of faculty and the pure inefficiency of this proposition. For example, large public institutions, such as those in G1 whose incoming classes range in the thousands of students, cannot deliver classes in this manner and remain financially viable.

Financial Aid

The Financial Aid pages feature a high degree of uncertainty and infrequently present estimated costs and tuition. Typically, this content appears at least one more page
away, so the user must continue to drill through layers of navigation to find the content. This characteristic is a shared similarity within and between the groups in the study. The institutions in the sample use language that attempts to communicate two messages: to ensure the viewers that (a) the institution’s cost of attendance is within the means of most prospective students and (b) the education one receives at the institution is of value. Such discourse leads to degrees of uncertainty (Fairclough 1995a, 2001; Urciuoli, 2003). Value is represented in terms of buying power both generally and specifically. For example, all three G1 institutions mention the average amount of financial aid awarded to students as a percentage but not an overall dollar amount.

Some of the institutions use visuals and page design to directly and indirectly acknowledge the topic of financial aid on the Financial Aid pages. Direct references include a table containing estimated costs and a seal from third-party publications describing the value of the institution. Indirect references include the use of secondary images associated with money and page design elements (e.g., calculator, green page background) to suggest the topic of financial aid (see Page Design in Chapter 5). Most of the institutions feature visuals unrelated to the financial aid directly or indirectly and show images related to campus scenery. Viewed through the lens offered by CDA, images that do not relate to a topic (i.e., financial aid) can serve as a distraction from the subject matter (Fairclough, 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Student Life

The Student Life pages for the institutions convey that the purpose of college is about more than higher education and emphasize the number of co-curricular activities available to students. Visual depictions of co-curricular activities are commonplace on this page for all of the institutions in the sample. A few differences surface for the institutions with regard to representation on diversity, religion, civic engagement, and student employment. For example, UIUC and SU address the topic of diversity much more directly, or at least attempt to do so more than any other institutions. Hartley and
Morphew (2008) stated, “Diversity is frequently ‘celebrated,’ but ill defined” (p. 686). This statement matches the findings for the institutions in the study. Regarding religion, only BSC details the religious opportunities on campus on the primary admissions page: “Weekly opportunities for religious life include the Gathering in Yeilding Chapel, a variety of Wesley small groups, an Interfaith Alliance, Catholic prayers, Episcopal Eucharist, Reformed University Fellowship, and Jewish Life. Students of many faiths find their place at BSC.”\footnote{115 Retrieved from: http://www.gotobsc.com/bsclife.htm 01/07/11} SOU and UI are the only institutions to specifically discuss intellectual development in relation to student life. Mentions of civic-minded activities appear in G1 and G4, both groups with publicly controlled institutions. For example, UIUC states, “From student organizations to leadership and volunteer opportunities, getting involved is easy at Illinois.”\footnote{116 Retrieved from: http://admissions.illinois.edu/campuslife/index.html 01/07/11} Stanford also mentions its 70 service-oriented student groups; however, it appears within a section discussing student groups in general. Lastly, SOU also mentions “work” as part of the student life experience at SOU. No other institution in the sample discussions this as part of student life.

**Social Goods**

This section provides a response to the final research sub-question regarding institutions’ representations of social goods (e.g., class, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation). The findings from this study suggest that institutions poorly represent social goods. Table 13 provides a summary of the total number of images and the number of female and non-white actors found in the sample.

This conclusion directly contradicts much of the rhetoric championed in institutional mission statements to embrace diversity in all its forms (e.g., Boyles, 2007; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Taylor & Morphew, 2010; Urciuoli, 2003, 2009).
Table 13: Total Number of Images and Types of Actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Home Page</th>
<th>About</th>
<th>Admissions</th>
<th>AMP</th>
<th>Financial Aid</th>
<th>Student Life</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Images</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>57 (28)</td>
<td>17 (34)</td>
<td>37 (30)</td>
<td>8 (35)</td>
<td>10 (37)</td>
<td>17 (57)</td>
<td>146 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-white (%)</td>
<td>30 (15)</td>
<td>9 (18)</td>
<td>37 (30)</td>
<td>8 (35)</td>
<td>5 (19)</td>
<td>9 (30)</td>
<td>98 (22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Textual constructions discussing diversity are virtually non-existent, and the visuals serve formulaic representations and even caricatures of “diversity” (Figures 6-8 in Chapter 5). For example, female students made up 46% of enrolled students at UIUC according to National Center for Education Statistics (IPEDS) data in 2008.\(^{117}\) Of the 30 images analyzed in the UIUC sample, only eleven (37%) featured female actors. In addition, non-white students made up 36% of enrolled students at UIUC the same year, yet representation in the sample does not reflect this percentage. Of the 30 images analyzed in the UIUC sample, eight (27%) feature non-white actors. This trend persists throughout the sample.\(^{118}\) At SU female enrollment is 49%\(^{119}\) yet representations of females on the SU pages do not approach this percentage. Of the 79 images analyzed in the SU sample, only 17 (22%) featured female actors. In addition, non-white students made up 53% of enrolled students at SU the same year, yet representation in the sample does not reflect


\(^{118}\) The race/ethnicity at the institutions in the sample contained a range of students according to 2008 data from IPEDS. For example, the number of white students at the institutions ranged from 36% (SU) to 88% (CC). African-American enrollment ranged from 2% (SOU) to 10% (SU). Asian enrollment ranged from 3% (CC) to 23% (SU). Hispanic enrollment ranged from 2% (G3) to 14% (HSU). Native American enrollment ranged from 0% (IU, UIUC, PU) to 3% (SU). While the scope of this study did not attend to the individual race/ethnicity categories, what is clear is that the proportion of white to non-white actors appearing in the sample is disproportionate to the actual amount of students enrolled at the institutions. Furthermore, female enrollment at the institutions in the sample ranged from 49% (PU, SU) to 57% (UI, RC, SOU). Again, the number of actors represented in the sample is disproportionate to the number of actual actors enrolled at the institutions.

this percentage. Of the 79 images analyzed in the SU sample, 17 (22%) feature non-white actors. Lack of female and underrepresented actors appears at similarly low percentage levels across institutions in the sample.

The number for non-white faculty is lower still. Non-white faculty members appear in seven images (1%) in the sample. None of the non-white faculty actors are female (0%). Interestingly, the non-white faculty members always appear in the presence of students (Figure 31).

Spare references to social goods primarily appeared on the Home page, Admissions page, and Financial Aid page. In these cases, institutions deployed indirect language (e.g., progressive academic climate or cultural opportunities) to acknowledge social goods. Urciuoli (2009) noted that strategically deploying language in this manner serves as referents designed to associate the subject with diversity, hinting at the potential for viewers. Class was the most directly referenced social good and frequently appeared on the Financial Aid page. For example, institutions in G2 and G3, composed of privately controlled institutions, utilized language designed to quell concerns of the cost of attendance. HU’s language appeared in the form of a scenario for the high-income family “facing unusual financing challenges.”120 The most direct reference to gender and race came on UIUC’s Admissions page. The “Illinois Profile” is a panel describing the demographics of the student body. UIUC states the percentage of the men (54) and women (46) enrolled and the percentage of the 2009 freshman class that is non-white (27). In addition, UIUC mentions that students come from all 50 states and 118 countries. SU also makes an attempt to clarify what “diversity” means. However, a viewer must navigate to another Web page to find out SU’s definition on this topic. Finally, representations of sexual orientation are wholly absent from the sample, both textually and visually.

120 Retrieved from: http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/financial_aid/index.html 01/07/11
As previously mentioned, by intentionally ignoring a subject or leaving definitions purposely unclear indicates that the producer of the message places marginal value on the subject or retains control over how the topic appears (Fairclough, 2001). Findings from this study support existing research on academic marketing (e.g., Boyles, 2007; Hartley & Morphew, 2010; Urciuoli, 2003, 2009) with regard to purposely leaving charged issues vague. Viewed from a lens offered by CDA, remaining silent on a topic either serves to reinforce societal norms or indicates a producer places little importance on the subject (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001).

Summary

This section contains a summary of the findings and a response to the overarching research question guiding the study: In what ways do colleges and universities use language (textual and visual) to represent themselves on institutional websites? The short answer to this query is that colleges and universities utilize promotional discourse to represent themselves on their institutional websites. The result of the promotional discourse is evident in three themes: similarity, uncertainty, and control. The theme of similarity builds uncertainty, which in turn builds on notions of control. The following subsections discuss each in detail and provide examples from the study and previous research to substantiate this finding.

Promotional Discourse

Promotional discourse dominates the sample and is indicative of the growing consumerism in higher education (e.g., Bok, 2003; Fairclough, 2001; Gumport, 2000; Kittle & Ciba, 1999; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). What appears on the websites is a generic and normative representation of the “lifestyle” associated with attending college. Capraro, Patrick, and Wilson (2004) posited, “attractiveness of social life…is at least as important as quality of education in determining the likelihood of a candidate undertaking decision approach actions toward a school” (p. 93). The analyses from this study suggest that colleges and universities
refined this sentiment and utilize promotional discourse en masse to market rather systematic representations of “higher education” despite the fact that they vary widely a number of institutional characteristics (e.g., type, control, geographic region, selectivity).

Multiple visuals serve as the primary driver of the messages on websites. The purpose behind the utilization of numerous images reveals an effort on the part of the institutions to create memorable impressions in the mind of the viewer (Anctil, 2008; Askehave, 2007; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Ramasubramanian et al., 2002; Toma et al., 2005). In an increasingly visual culture, the use of images has a high level of salience when communicating promotional messages (Fairclough, 1993, 2001; Hall, 1997; Kress, 2000; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), especially to prospective students (Askehave, 2007; Capraro, Patrick, & Wilson, 2004; Klassen, 2000; Poock & Lefond, 2001; Ramasubramanian et al., 2002; Schneider, 2006). Multiple visual representations populate the pages in the sample; in fact, on the 72 pages in the sample, over 450 distinct images appear. Countless hyperlinks, numerous graphics, and institutional logos appear on the Web pages to help demonstrate the number of options available to the viewer of the site. Despite the reliance on visuals, rarely do unique images appear other than the logo of the institution and the varying campus architectural designs that stand out against the campus landscape (recall Figure 4 in Chapter 5). Unkempt actors and unattractive aspects of the campus (such as construction and deferred maintenance) are wholly missing from the representations in the data. Existing literature comments on the trend for institutions to adopt the marketing practices of highly selective and elite institutions (e.g., Carlson, 2010; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Golden, 2007; Massey et al., 2003; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Stevens, 2007).

Similarity

DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) concept of mimetic isomorphism provides insight into why organizations utilize similar discourse when promoting their institutions. Mimetic isomorphism suggests that institutions adopt the practices of organizations they
perceive to be of higher standing and prestige. Findings of this study indicate that institutions in all strata of higher education emulate the elite institutions to the point where gradations are minimal regardless of type, control, geographic region, selectivity, and so on. This process cuts both ways, as the research demonstrates that even elite institutions use promotional practices similar to their less illustrious competitors (Bok, 2003). In essence, the institutions resort to a mixture of discourse that dilutes their product. As Boyles (2007) stated, institutions are marketing “sameness” (p. 538). This comes in light of reports indicating that prospective student findings can detect generic depictions and that such representation detracts from their impressions of the institution (Jaschik, 2007). Institutions may be wary of stepping too far “outside the box” in terms of representation. Failing to discuss student clubs and organizations and customizable majors, or showing scenes of students on a grassy quad may alter perceptions of legitimacy. From an institutional perspective, Meyer, Deal, and Scott (1981) aptly capture the cause of this modal behavior: “A school succeeds if everyone agrees that it is a school; it fails if no one believes that it is a school, regardless of its success in instruction or socialization” (p. 56).

Another drawback of promotional discourse, versus informational discourse, is that it may serve to confuse the viewer (Fairclough, 2001). Those seeking information about access to higher education may face frustration at the inability to find the appropriate information to answer their questions due to the fact that many institutions represent themselves in such a homogeneous manner. For example, the financial aid pages of the institutions in the sample contain a high degree of uncertainty.

Uncertainty

Revealed through the descriptive analysis in Chapters 4 and 5, institutions present limited amounts of content directly related to financial aid. Much of the content that appears contains cursory information and forces the viewer to navigate further for additional Web pages on the topic. Images rarely relate to the topic of financial aid.
Rather, scenes of college life in general (e.g., architecture, classroom interaction, student life) populate the site. Direct avoidance of a subject visually also signals a producer’s desire to distract attention on a topic or remain silent on the matter (Fairclough, 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). As such, it creates uncertainty, which reduces the amount of agency available to the user (Fairclough, 1995a, 2001). Moreover, vague or indirect representations are a form of institutional control (Fairclough, 1995a, 2001).

Research pertaining to students’ perceptions of financial aid (e.g., Avery & Hoxby, 2004; Kim et al., 2009; Venegas, 2006) substantiates this finding. This research suggests that students’ understandings of financial aid vary greatly due, in part, to the difficulty associated with finding relevant information about financial aid. For example, Grodsky & Jones (2007) found that students as well as parents tend to inaccurately estimate the costs and prices associated with college enrollment. Consequently, students and parents have unrealistic notions about costs of enrollment and the availability of financial aid (Avery & Hoxby, 2007; Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Kim et al., 2009; Perna, 2006; Morphew & Taylor, 2010). Hossler et al. (1999) crystallize the matter: “Students going through a college-choice process for the first, and possibly only, time must have experience and knowledge of seasoned observers” (p. 153). As previously noted, those from underrepresented populations demonstrating the most difficulty with the topic of financial aid, especially as it appears on institutional websites (Venegas, 2006). Viewed through a lens offered by CDA, the placement of content related to financial aid in multiple layers of navigation and the lack of clarity in the content serves to support existing social structures. In order to locate, decipher and ultimately use the content takes a certain amount of social and cultural capital (McDonough, 1994, 1997; Perna 2004, 2007; Venegas, 2006). As previously mentioned, existing research on the barriers to higher education state that access to information related to financial aid continues to inhibit enrollment for underrepresented populations (e.g., Kim et al., 2009; McDonough, 1997; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Nora, 2004; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Perna
Uncertainty is not limited to the financial aid pages in the sample, however. Since the matter of financial aid plays a key role in prospective student’s college-process, this study adds to the existing research that demonstrates another reason why the matter of financial aid is so confusing: it is presented in an unclear manner.

Control

The use of promotional discourse suggests that very similar representations persist on college and university websites in the sample. By utilizing similar promotional discourse, the institutions choose what to present, emphasize, and exclude (Fairclough, 2001). Hence, institutions retain a great amount of control over what content the viewer has access to on the institutional website. The language in use reveals that the institutions retain significant control over its actors with strategic placement of obligational discourse and, in most cases, complete silence on issues. Nowhere is this more apparent than on the Financial Aid pages in the sample (discussed above). The institutions make few, if any, demands of the students and do not take the opportunity to set standards for student accountability. The scholarly commitment associated with higher education plays a reduced role while the intangibles available to the prospective student are at the forefront of representations in the sample. These elements then evoke an “image” of what a particular product, in this case higher education, should be and how it should operate (Fairclough, 2001). By placing the emphasis on the intangibles, and not necessarily all of the details, which the institutions remains in control of, conflates the purpose of higher education and the sense of agency promoted with relational discourse (Fairclough, 2001).

If the primary function of a higher education institution is to attract students so the organization can maintain a distinctive profile and standing in society while preparing its graduates for private sector employment, it is not surprising that institutions take this approach to promoting themselves. However, such discourse constructs an unrealistic portrayal of higher education while simultaneously reducing the role higher education has
as a social institution committed to teaching, research, and service (Boyles, 2007; Breneman, 1994; Fairclough, 2001; Gumport, 2000; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Labaree, 1997; McDonough, 1994; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Furthermore, historical accounts and the mission statements of the institutions themselves purport a more principled standing and function in society. Fairclough (2001) stated, “The academy has been pushed into a closely networked relationship with business and government, and talk of autonomy is largely nostalgia” (p. 216).

Implications of This Study for Practice

This section discusses the implications for practice in four areas: portrayal of underrepresented populations, marketing differentiation, access to information about financial aid, and response to the current debate about the state of admissions and recruiting practices in higher education.

Portrayal of Underrepresented Populations

This study supports existing research (e.g., Boyles, 2007; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Taylor & Morphew, 2010) and suggests that mimetic isomorphism pervades the language colleges and universities use to represent themselves. Garcia (1999) argued that to “celebrate diversity” with representations of traditionally known practices (e.g., Japanese tea ceremonies, Kwanzaa), institutions portray diversity as “familiar and non-threatening for many in the majority” (p. 305). Such representations also “neatly map” prospective students into compartmentalized groups, perhaps serving to marginalize them further (Urciuoli, 2009, p. 395). Moreover, it becomes problematic for admissions personnel to explain to non-white prospective students the nature of such stereotypical representations of diversity (Stevens, 2007). In this sense, marketing the “familiar” is much easier for the viewer to process, but seems to be the antithesis of what diversity truly represents (Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Urciuoli, 2009).

While this study supports much of the previous research on the academic marketing of higher education, it also provides some additional ideas for practitioners to
consider. Recently, William Tierney, president-elect of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and Director of the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis at the University of Southern California, stated, “If we want to craft a class that is as diverse as we will be in 2023, we need to make big changes” (as cited in Hoover, 2011). Directly related to this quotation is a call for institutions to honestly represent diverse actors. Images of underrepresented individuals are lacking, but it only compounds the matter when portrayals are disingenuous. For example, it is possible to represent a Native American student without decorating the individual with tribal or cultural artifacts. Native American students take classes, work in labs, and participate in theatre productions as many of their college-going peers, but findings from this study indicate they are not shown in such settings. One solution might be to simply include a caption to an image in reference to this population in such a setting to acknowledge the presence of this population on campus.

This comes in light of enrollment projections indicating students from underrepresented populations will significantly increase in the coming decade and beyond (Perna, 2007; Perna & Titus, 2005). Representing a diverse student population may not be easy, but formulaic portrayals call into question whether diverse students on campus truly integrated into curricular and non-curricular settings at the institutions. As colleges and universities attempt to determine the best way to represent their student population, it is an important point to consider. In a progressively more diverse consumer market and with those from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds realizing their dreams of higher education, an institution that authentically represents itself along the lines of culture, ethnicity, and race stands to make significant gains.

Marketing Differentiation

Not all institutions have prestigious reputations to trade on, so if the institution does something well, or with some exclusivity, it seems prudent to focus on that rather than the fact that the institution is home to the largest climbing wall in the nation. This is
especially the case when it comes to academic departments and offerings. For example, SOU has an accelerated baccalaureate program, yet it does not make any overt attempts to promote the program other than with one image on its Home Page and one link on its AMP page. Similarly, CC guarantees that its students will graduate (and study abroad and obtain an internship) in 4 years or the institution will cover the cost of tuition for an additional year. Countless other differences likely exist as well; however, analyses of the data in this sample make it difficult to tell where tangible distinctions actually appear.

Too often do institutions try to be too much to too many audiences, which can lead to the dilution of the brand and loss of identity (Anctil, 2008; Carlson, 2010; Kotler & Fox, 1995; Martin, 1989; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Toma et al., 2005).

Considering the resources institutions invest in admissions and recruitment efforts, it is not as if colleges and universities lack the power to make this information available; it may have more to do with whether existing leadership has the ability and understanding of the institution’s mission to do so. In essence, the institutions need to reflect on their strengths and consistently promote messages designed around them (Hoover, 2011). A reduction in the amount of misinformation and a commitment to improving the “quality of information” are specific areas admissions and recruitment offices can directly address (Grodsky & Jones, 2007, p. 763).

The axiom of “more information does not equal good information” comes to mind. Admissions and recruitment offices can make honest efforts to include information most pertinent about their respective institution since research demonstrates students get information from a wide range of outlets (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; McDonough, 1997; Morphew & Taylor, 2010). McDonough (1997) suggests colleges and universities start promotional campaigns that detail the type of information that is pertinent to college preparation such as the types of courses necessary for admission. In addition, these types of campaigns should include information such as graduation rates and transfer rates from
surrounding community colleges (McDonough, 1997). Colleges and universities could also resist “playing the rankings game” by distributing information that decodes or compliments the content of the rankings and publications (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009). A simple and straightforward presentation of information is one suggestion. For example, using a consistent Web page design throughout the website is a basic, and relatively inexpensive, step towards making inroads in this process. Existing research demonstrates what students know, do not know, and want to know about college-going (e.g., Adelman, 2006; Hossler, 1999; Perna, 2004; Poock & Lefond, 2001; Venegas, 2006). Information related to financial aid is one area with which to begin.

Provide Clarity Regarding Financial Aid Content

Practitioners need to increase clarity pertaining to financial aid information. Mounting evidence demonstrates that prospective students, especially those from underrepresented populations, and their families have difficulty understanding and applying content related to financial aid (e.g., Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Perna, 2004; Venegas, 2006). In addition, access to economic resources widely varies by institutional type (Winston, 2004). Research also demonstrates that students’ (and parents’) understanding of financial aid content (e.g., amount of aid, cost) are positively related to postsecondary outcomes such as application, choice, and expectations (Perna, 2004). Colleges and universities can provide a clearer path to information about financial aid. The Admissions navigations menu on the Home Page is one place to start. In addition to providing links to “Academics,” “Athletics,” and “Student Life,” provide a direct link to a page containing the estimated costs, amount of aid, and basic information about types of aid, free of enrollment management jargon (e.g., tuition-discounting). Policymakers and administrators alike need to constantly evaluate institutional web sites and reassess

---

121 McDonough (1997) duly noted that this idea would not be popular, though it could serve as a step in the right direction if colleges at least attempted to present more than just the “most accurately defensible numbers” (Stevens, 2007, p. 47).
their use of websites to be sure they present and provide information that students truly need rather than capitulate to demands for information and services that students are not yet asking for and may not regularly use (Adelman, 2006; Hossler 1999). So, rather than burying information related to financial aid several levels below the Home Page, present it in “prime” viewing space along with other topics related to admissions.

Because cost is a point of competition, it is reasonable to assume that institutions would want to make the cost of tuition more visible and understandable. College admissions and financial aid offices could work together to dovetail information about the benefits and costs of attending a particular institution. For instance, translating and printing materials into languages other than English (e.g., Spanish) might assist in helping those from individuals from language minority populations’ in comprehending the information (O’Connor et al., 2008). If higher education is going to be marketed as a product, and not a process, it stands to reason that institutions be more forthright with information about the cost of tuition and the price students pay for attending. The term “value” is another instance of an SDS especially considering that actual dollar amounts are absent (Urciuoli, 2003). The inclusion of rankings from third-party publications suggests that the institution is trying to associate “affordability” to something tangible (Anctil, 2008). Representation of this type that equates “students” to “consumers” demonstrates the increasing commodification of the college-choice process (e.g., Bok, 2003; Boyles, 2007; Fairclough, 1993, 1995, 2001; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; McDonough, 1994; Urciuoli, 2003). As emerging research continues to document the commodification of higher education, it is important to consider the ramifications of such discourse on institutional websites. The colleges and universities in this sample enjoy considerable state and federal support as non-profit institutions (e.g., tax-exempt status), yet use promotional discourse that resembles that of for-profit entrepreneurial entities. In light of public-support, analyses reveal discourse that promotes college as a necessary step into a comfortable career. If colleges and universities function as a gatekeeper to a
“middle class” lifestyle then the results of the study do little to contradict this notion. However, the rhetoric espoused in the mission statements of the institutions themselves contains a more principled stance.

State of Admissions and Recruiting Practices

Recent commentary on higher education wrestles with the question of whether admissions and recruitment administrators have “sold their soul” in the face of competition for high-achieving, premium students while under the constraints of trying economic times (Barnds, 2010; Carlson, 2010; Hoover, 2011). With a greater influx of applications, increased competition from for-profit institutions, demand for high-ability students, and the necessity of tuition revenue, admissions personnel are stretched even thinner. The growing reliance on advertising discourse at the suggestion of privately-held consulting firms armed with “market research” serves to further complicate the matter.

Ironically, and perhaps not surprisingly, an article profiling how colleges and universities can build perceptions of prestige suggested administrators “think outside the box” (Carlson, 2010). One suggestion is to reflect on the mission of the institution. Mission statements are an important symbol that represents an institution’s purpose at a given point in time, created to either be instructional or to generate a shared sense of purpose (Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Taylor & Morphew, 2010). Rather than perpetuate vague and normative discourse, use the mission statement as it is intended. Perhaps it is easier to start with a few basic questions: (a) Why does this institution exist?; (b) What are the outcomes of higher education?; (c) Whose interests do these outcomes truly serve? Higher education institutions should not strive to serve an “all-purpose purpose” (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p. 3), namely because that is not their role in society (Gumport, 2000). Yes, society is in need of skilled workers, but what is more pressing is society’s need for an educated citizenry capable of attending to its needs as a whole. Aspirations are fine, even noble; however, they should be genuine, responsible, and realistic.
Institutions’ marketing efforts face increasingly strong competition from for-profit and online educational outlets (Anctil, 2008; Gumport, 2000). Moreover, as the nature of enrollment of underrepresented and first-generation students expands, the traditional model of higher education must adapt to remain socially and economically viable (Morphew & Eckel, 2009). Not all institutions are elite, therefore mimicking the practices of such institutions may only serve to further dilute the institutional brand and ignore potentially rich partnerships with non-feeder schools, primarily ones serving underrepresented populations and first-generation students (Hoover, 2011). Anctil (2008) aptly concluded, “Colleges and universities can successfully market themselves while adhering to education values, but doing so demands these institutions use their marketing as a way of tightening their mission, purpose, and practice” (p. 26).

College choice is not always an “apples to apples” comparison, though as a collective set of practitioners, individuals working in admissions, marketing, financial aid, and recruitment offices can take a stand to ensure their institutions conduct themselves in a manner that is in the spirit of reducing impediments and increasing access to education with progressive strategies. Attempting new strategies will take a continued effort so practitioners who develop new thoughts need institutional support to allow time for the conceptual ideas to return as practical results. Niu and Tienda (2008) crystallize the matter: “Vigorous outreach by postsecondary institutions can modify college-going behavior” (p. 431). Failure to address these issues at the institutional level will ultimately lead to state and federal intervention. Legislative regulation may truly stifle the attempts of institutions to reduce the impediments to higher education for all populations. It will take challenging existing budgetary constraints and tradition, but with diligence the possibility of reducing impediments to access and providing better information for prospective students and their families is in the hands of college admissions and financial aid officers right now.
This section discusses potential directions for future research related to academic marketing and CDA. Previous research demonstrated the role of websites in the college-choice process although empirically driven research detailing the extent to which websites affect the process remains scarce (Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Fairclough, 2001; Saichaie, 2010). Of the research examining the role of websites, a large majority is relegated to that of studies conducted by higher education consulting firms. Therefore, future research ought to be guided by theoretical constructs as a way to further the understanding of how academic marketing affects prospective students and their college-choice process (Gladieux & Swail, 1999a; Hossler, 1999; Perna, 2004, 2007; McDonough, 2003; Tierney, 2004; Venegas 2006). Equally, scholars in the fields of critical studies (e.g., Askehave, 2007; Chiper, 2006; Fairclough, 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Mautner 2005a, 2005b) acknowledge the mounting presence of websites in relation to higher education, noting its role in relation to access and choice issues.

The proliferation of the Internet and primacy of institutional websites as sources for information about college-going has led some to question whether it ultimately serves as another means of repression (e.g., Fairclough, 2001; Gladieux & Swail, 1999a; Trowler, 2001). Access to the technology is on the rise; however, technology is simply a tool in need of command in order to properly function. This research is limited to 12 institutions, focused on six specific Web pages. One might argue the sample institutions are too homogenous in that they represent a fairly resource-rich set of institutions with plenty of applicants. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that institutions in the sample might represent themselves similarly. Future research might examine a greater depth of institutions across the strata of colleges and universities in the United States. Future studies could expand to different types of institutions (e.g., community colleges, for-profit) or marketing to particular types of students (e.g., international, non-traditional, online) and look at the deeper corpus of language. Additionally, as research advances and
knowledge about the acquisition, retention, and transfer of capital (cultural, economic, human, and social) progresses, it is important to examine how other factors, such as mass media and technology, affect the process.

Future research on the effects of academic marketing materials may extend into more detailed explorations of how prospective students use the marketing materials and the paths they take to access information; ultimately how the interaction of the two affects the choice process. Research of this nature is timely due to the ever-expanding number of students seeking access to higher education (e.g., The College Board, 2009; Hoover, 2011) and the rapid development of technology (e.g., mobile, 3D multimedia, online educational delivery, virtual reality).

The increasing presence of social networking sites (SNS), such as Facebook and Twitter, in the battery of admissions and recruitment practices could serve as a platform for future investigation. As institutions attempt to harness this emerging medium, research may consider how institutions represent themselves on the websites in which control of the site is under the command of a third-party, profit-driven entity. For instance, one might compare the type of language used to construct relationships with prospective students on these sites compared to the institutional sites.

Since websites represent only one facet of college and university marketing efforts, future research may explore the spectrum of academic marketing materials from institutions across an array of mediums (e.g., websites, viewbooks, mission statements). By examining the discourse across mediums, analysts might be able to determine the nature of discourse within the entirety of an academic marketing campaign. For example, one may consider comparing the language utilized on institutional websites with the language found in viewbooks. Such research would provide additional insight into how admissions and recruitment materials are presented to prospective students.

Employing CDA as a conceptual framework for this study provided additional insight into the utility of the approach. CDA permits researchers to make interpretations
and explanations through reflexive and rigorous methods of inquiry (e.g., Fairclough, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Halliday, 1985; Rogers et al., 2005). The goal is to deconstruct a message and look at its functional parts to understand and interpret the relationship between the data, its producers, and prospective audience. Analyzing data through the lens provided by CDA allows the researcher to demonstrate how the properties of language function to contribute to the formation of social identities and practices (Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 2001).

Further research using CDA may serve to elucidate areas previously overlooked by administrators and policymakers alike. This is of particular importance as first-generation students, individuals from underrepresented populations, non-traditional, and international students navigate the increasingly complex arena of information about college-going and seek access to higher education. While comparison is not at the heart of CDA, or qualitative research techniques (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007; Rogers, 2004), expanding analyses to other institutional websites using CDA are potential avenues worthy of pursuit. As Gee (2005) noted, CDA is a powerful complement to other methodological and theoretical approaches to research. Harnessing CDA in combination with other approaches will serve to further illuminate understanding of power structures that permit or inhibit access to prominent institutions in society such as higher education.
APPENDIX A

JANKS LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS RUBRIC
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguistic feature</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lexicalization</strong></td>
<td>The selection/choice of wordings. Different words construct the same idea differently.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overlexicalization</strong></td>
<td>Many words for the same phenomenon.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lexical cohesion</strong></td>
<td>Created by synonymy, antonymy, repetition, and collocation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Euphemism</strong></td>
<td>Hides negative actions or implications.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transitivity</strong></td>
<td>Processes in verbs: are they verbs of?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>doing</strong>: action and material processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>being or having</strong>: relational processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>thinking/feeling/perceiving</strong>: mental</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>saying</strong>: verbal processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>physiological</strong>: behavioral processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>existential</strong>: experiential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voice</strong></td>
<td>Active and passive voice constructs participants as <em>actors</em> or as <em>reactors</em> to actions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passive voice allows for the deletion of the agent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nominalization</strong></td>
<td>A process is turned into a thing or an event without participants or tense or modality. Central mechanism for reification.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quoted speech</strong></td>
<td>Direct speech (DS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indirect speech (IS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mood</strong></td>
<td>Is the clause a statement, question, offer or command?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modality</strong></td>
<td>Social authority and degrees of uncertainty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modality created by modals (may, might, Could, will), adverbs (possibly, certainly, hopefully) intonation, tag questions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pronouns</strong></td>
<td>Inclusive: we/exclusive we/you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Us and them: othering pronouns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexist/non sexist pronouns: generic &quot;he&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The choice of first/ second/third person.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sequencing of information</strong></td>
<td>Sequence sets up cause and effect. Conjunctions are:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Additive</strong>: and, in addition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Causal</strong>: because, so, therefore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Adversative</strong>: although, yet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Temporal</strong>: when, while, after, before</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX B
KRESS AND VAN LEEUWEN VISUAL ANALYSIS RUBRIC
Table B1: Kress and van Leeuwen Visual Analysis Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual feature</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Descriptors</strong></td>
<td>A basic description of the visual elements such as: actors and carriers; angle; colors; graphics; font; page design; perspective; settings; spatial relationships.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actor</strong></td>
<td>The active participant(s) in an action process is the participant(s) from which the vector emanates or which is fused with the vector.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td>The passive participant in an action process is the participant at which the vector is directed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactors</strong></td>
<td>The participants in a transactional action process where the vector could be said to emanate from, and be directed at, both participants.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reacter</strong></td>
<td>The active participant in a reaction process is the participant whose look creates the eyeline.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transactional reaction</strong></td>
<td>An eyeline vector connects two participants, a Reacter and Phenomenon.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-transactional reaction</strong></td>
<td>An eyeline vector emanates from a participant, the Reacter, but does not point at another participant.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td>The setting of a process is recognizable because the participants in the foreground overlap and hence partially obscure it; (e.g. soft focus, over/under color saturation) and overall darkness or lightness between foreground and background.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Means</strong></td>
<td>A process used to created image (e.g. photograph, graphic, logo).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symbolic Attributes</strong></td>
<td>Symbolic Attributes are made salient in the representation in one way or another. For instance, by being placed in the foreground, through exaggerated size, through being especially well lit, through being represented in fine detail or sharp focus, or through their conspicuous color or tone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symbolic Suggestive</strong></td>
<td>Symbolic Suggestive depictions are not represented as a general essence rather than a specific instance. Visuals of this nature may use soft focus, blending of colors, outlines or silhouettes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sequencing of information.</strong></td>
<td>Sequence sets up cause and effect. placement of images on a page (e.g. high, low).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX C
SAMPLE URLS
Home Page
Home Page: http://iub.edu/index.shtml
Home Page: http://illinois.edu/
Home Page: http://www.uiowa.edu/
Home Page: http://www.harvard.edu/
Home Page: http://www.princeton.edu/main/
Home Page: http://stanford.edu/
Home Page: http://www.bsc.edu/
Home Page: http://www.centre.edu/
Home Page: http://www.rhodes.edu/
Home Page: http://www.ewu.edu/Home.xml
Home Page: http://www.humboldt.edu/
Home Page: http://sou.edu/about/

About
About IU: http://iub.edu/about/index.shtml
Who We Are: http://illinois.edu/about/about.html
About Iowa: http://www.uiowa.edu/homepage/about-UI/index.html
About Harvard College: http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/about/index.html
About Princeton: http://www.princeton.edu/main/about/
About Stanford: http://stanford.edu/about/
About BSC: http://www.gotobsc.com/about.htm
About Centre: http://www.centre.edu/about_centre/index.html
About Rhodes: http://www.rhodes.edu/about/default.asp
About SOU: http://sou.edu/about/
About Humboldt: http://www.humboldt.edu/humboldt/about
About EWU: http://www.ewu.edu/About.xml

Admissions
Office of Admissions: http://admit.indiana.edu/
Admissions: http://admissions.illinois.edu/
First-Year Students: http://www.uiowa.edu/admissions/undergrad/first-year/index.html

Undergraduate Admission: http://www.princeton.edu/admission/
Undergraduate Admission: http://admission.stanford.edu/

Go To BSC: http://www.gotobsc.com/index.htm
Admission: http://www.centre.edu/admission/index.html
Admissions: http://www.rhodes.edu/admissions/default.asp

Undergraduate Admissions: http://www.ewu.edu/Undergrad.xml
Office of Admissions: http://pine.humboldt.edu/admissions/
Admissions: http://sou.edu/admissions/

AMP
Majors, Degrees & Programs: http://admit.indiana.edu/academics/majors/index.shtml
Academic Life: http://admissions.illinois.edu/academics/index.html
Majors & Programs: http://www.uiowa.edu/admissions/undergrad/majors/index.html

Fields of Concentration:
http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/about/learning/concentrations.html
Undergraduate Studies: http://www.princeton.edu/main/academics/undergraduate/
Academics: http://www.stanford.edu/academics/

Majors & Minors: http://www.gotobsc.com/academics/majmin.htm
Majors & Minors: http://www.centre.edu/majors/index.html
Academics: http://www.rhodes.edu/academics/default.asp

Academics: http://www.ewu.edu/Academics/Programs.xml
Majors & Programs: http://www.humboldt.edu/humboldt/programs
Academic Departments: http://sou.edu/programs.shtml

Financial Aid
Office of Student Financial Aid: http://www.osfa.uiuc.edu/

Undergraduate Basic: http://www.stanford.edu/dept/finaid/undergrad/


Financial Aid and Scholarships: http://www.ewu.edu/Admissions/Financial-Aid.xml
Financial Aid: http://pine.humboldt.edu/finaid/
Enrollment Services: http://sou.edu/enrollment/financial-aid/

Student Life
Student Life: http://admit.indiana.edu/life/index.shtml
Campus Life: http://admissions.illinois.edu/campuslife/index.html

Beyond the Classroom:
http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/about/beyond/index.html
Campus Life: http://www.princeton.edu/main/campuslife/
The Student Perspective: http://www.stanford.edu/dept/uga/student/index.html

BSC Life: http://www.gotobsc.com/bsclife.htm
Campus Life: http://www.centre.edu/campus_life/
Campus Life: http://www.rhodes.edu/campuslife/default.asp

Life at EWU: http://www.ewu.edu/Undergrad/Life.xml
Student Life:
https://humboldt.askadmissions.net/aeresults.aspx?did=2&cid=2212&quser=Student+Life&submit.x=0&submit.y=0&submit=ask
Student Life: http://sou.edu/students.shtml
REFERENCES


